

# Aspects of Guru Nanak's PHILOSOPHY

Wazir Singh

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**Wazir Singh**

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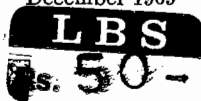
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## FOREWORD

The religious movement initiated by the Sikh Gurus presents a unique phenomenon in the religious history of India. Guru Nanak started this movement five hundred years ago — a movement distinct from both Hinduism and Islam. His 'dialogues' with leaders of different sects and schools of thought reveal his rational, experimental and critical approach to religion. He questioned the relevance of both the Brahmin priest and the Muslim Mulla and rejected the Hindu ritualism and Muslim ceremonialism. He avoided the Arabic language of the Muslims and the Sanskrit of the Brahmins.

Guru Nanak did not base his authority on the Vedas or the Qu'ran. The truth which filled his mind was not borrowed from books. It emanated from his religious experience. It came to him as an illumination of his entire life. He realized the eternal Truth and showed others the path of God-realization. 'So says Nanak, so says Nanak' is the burden of his songs. He guided the common people in their temporal difficulties as well as in their spiritual quest. He spread his message in a language intelligible to the ordinary man, which henceforth came to be known as *Gurubani*. It has ever since brought comfort and peace to sensitive souls in moments of strain, misery and death.

Substantial studies have been made regarding the social, political and cultural implications of the teachings contained in the *Gurubani*. It has been and continues to be pervasively used for personal and communal edification. But the works that focus on the philosophy of *Gurubani* are few and far between. It is a field rich with potentialities for research. There is need for sustained study of the basic concepts of *Gurubani* and a systematic exposition of its philosophy.

S. Wazir Singh of the Department of Philosophy, Punjabi University, Patiala has attempted to draw, in this brief volume, our attention to some aspects of Guru Nanak's philosophy. With his training in philosophy, knowledge of Punjabi and Sikh scriptures, he is well-qualified to undertake such a work. S. Wazir Singh has worked as a Senior Research Fellow in Punjabi University making an intensive study of Sikh thought.

I commend the present volume to all concerned as a valuable introduction to the philosophy of Guru Nanak. I also hope that the author will undertake a further, systematic study of *Gurubani* in the near future.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Guru Nanak and His Spiritual Successors**

According to the Sikh faith founded by Guru Nanak, the 'spirit' of Nanak entered the nine successive *gurus* one after another. The second Guru, Angad, was thus Nanak II, the third Guru, Amardas, was Nanak III, and so on. The spiritual essence of the universe, as intuited by Guru Nanak, was personally experienced and inwardly realized by each of the nine Gurus, before they successively undertook the mission of enlightening mankind. It is amazing that between A.D. 1469 (birth of Guru Nanak) and A.D. 1708 (the year of the Tenth Guru's death) gifted leaders of such calibre were continuously available to nourish the cherished cause. Seven of them were poets; a substantial amount of their poetic work is of a very high order as devotional and spiritual poetry.

Duncan Greenlees employs an interesting device to describe the various facets of the Nanak-genealogy. He associates one outstanding quality of their life to each one of the Gurus, in the following manner :

|                                |                |
|--------------------------------|----------------|
| Guru Nanak I-                  | Humility       |
| Guru Nanak II (Angad)-         | Obedience      |
| Guru Nanak III (Amardas)-      | Equality       |
| Guru Nanak IV (Ramdas)-        | Service        |
| Guru Nanak V (Arjan)-          | Self-sacrifice |
| Guru Nanak VI (Har Gobind)-    | Justice        |
| Guru Nanak VII (Har Rai)-      | Mercy          |
| Guru Nanak VIII (Har Krishan)- | Purity         |
| Guru Nanak IX (Tegh Bahadur)-  | Calmness       |
| Guru Nanak X (Gobind Singh)-   | Royal Courage  |

Evidently, the Gurus complemented one another and accomplished the task of establishing a code of spiritual and moral life, collectively. The qualities associated with their names constitute more or less the Sikh ethics. The philosophy of life they offered to humanity can be best appreciated by integrating their respective teachings and messages. Nevertheless, all the essential features of this philosophy can be noticed in the compositions of Guru Nanak, who not only initiated the movement, but inspired his noble successors to carry forward the process.

“The Guru is the indwelling Divine who teaches all through the gentle voice of conscience. ... Nanak is, for the Sikhs, the voice of God arousing the soul to spiritual effort.” Giving an account of the role played by the Gurus, Dr Radhakrishnan remarks: “The Gurus are the light-bearers to mankind. They are the messengers of the Timeless. They do not claim to teach a new doctrine but only to renew the eternal wisdom.” Quest for the *guru* had been characteristic of the Indian spiritual tradition, which always insisted on the need of a guide to correctly lead the new aspirant to the secrets of spirituality. Guru Nanak, though he himself fulfilled the requisites of the *guru*, repeatedly calls to attention the necessity of receiving initiation from a perfect master and enlightener. What a Buddha or Krishna, or Nanak came to acquire *a priori*, by way of intuitive revelation, was recommended to be achieved by others through reasoning and faith. Guru Nanak thought it best to appoint a succession of guides for the purpose. Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Master, however, appointed no human individual as his successor, but instead bestowed the guruship on the teachings of the earlier Gurus and devotees, as enshrined in the *Adi Granth*.

All the subsequent nine Gurus, following in the footsteps of Guru Nanak, stuck to the conventions of a householder's life, carried on with the work of social reform, and encouraged their followers to lead an honest life and to set aside a part of their earnings for collective welfare. Whenever opportunity arose, the Gurus were in the forefront, to set examples for others, in joining

the just struggles of the people and honourably acquitting themselves, even at the supreme sacrifice of their lives, when necessary.

The running thread of philosophical thought in all the ten Gurus, amply projected in the compositions of seven of them, point, in the main, to the following issues :

(1) Theism which in this context means a profound and indubitable faith in the existence of God in both His revealed and unrevealed aspects. (2) Theology or the discussion of concepts involving transmigration of the soul, emancipation, *karma*, and so on. (3) Cosmology, distinguishing the manifest from the pre-cosmic, unmanifest state of the Absolute. (4) Ontology, indicating the nature of the Supreme Being of Guru Nanak's concept and the ultimate constituents of the phenomenal existence. (5) Axiology, as the discussion of intrinsic values residing in the Absolute. (6) Epistemology, as criticism of the existing methods and determining the nature of the Truth. (7) Devotional methodology leading to an aesthetic-cum-spiritual state of being, with the help of a *guru*. (8) The concept of man and social philosophy. (9) Ethical philosophy indicating realizable values for human life. (10) A way of life based on enlightenment, humanism, equipoise and seeking union with the Ultimate Reality.



## **Metaphysical Outlook of Guru Nanak**

The metaphysical content of Guru Nanak's poetry lends itself to diverse interpretations. Most of its implications may be explained in terms of the various systems of Indian philosophy and *Bhakti* tradition, since a large number of the concepts involved owe their origin to ancient Indian scriptures and treatises, such as the *Gita*, the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas*, the orthodox and the heterodox *darshanas*. Nevertheless, it seems possible to interpret some of Guru Nanak's major doctrines in terms of the categories evolved by modern philosophy in the idiom understood by the reading community.

Metaphysics, as the study of being and existence, is sometimes equated with philosophy, or a part of philosophy called ontology. It is, indeed, a speculative venture of the human mind into the first principles of being as such, presented in a logical system of ideas. From the Indian standpoint, however, it is a discipline leading to the actual vision or *darshana* of the Supreme Reality, normally hidden from the common view. Two questions that stand out in any metaphysical theory are the nature of the ultimate constitution of the universe, and the human realization of the mystery of such reality. Recent developments in metaphysics, apart from the anti-metaphysics role of a group of thinkers, converge on the establishment of a criterion of reality that contributes to the enrichment of human experience and tends to satisfy man's longing for the ultimate explanations. It is realized, in consonance with the Indian belief, that it is man, after all, who is a 'metaphysical animal' or a 'being who asks what being is'. All questions of the essence of being, or values, or God are, of course, questions of human knowledge. A philosopher, therefore, performs the function of suggesting a way of

life, in addition to his metaphysical speculation about reality, and evaluation of the various approaches to truth.

### **A Philosophic Mind**

Even though Guru Nanak was not a philosopher in the technical sense, the content of his compositions reveals all the marks of a philosophic mind. He conceived the phenomenal process of the universe as one completed whole within a higher reality, which, he asserted, cannot be fully grasped or evaluated in human terms. He, however, did not divorce the reality of his vision from the truth of existence; according to him, the essence of the Supreme Reality or Being permeates the entire phenomenal existence. In accepting the truth of 'creation', he ranks among realists, though he would not allow the whole of reality to the world. His metaphysics holds the universe to be an expression of the hidden reality and not merely a grand illusion. Man can know more and more of this expression, if not by intellect alone, then by intuition and direct apprehension.

Another philosophic feature of the Guru's compositions is the conception of Truth that covers the entire gamut of 'knowable' existence. Speculation is relevant in the region of ontology; but where epistemology is concerned, we strive to be definite about what we know and how we know it. Guru Nanak's universe is true, its parts are true, its forms are true. This pluralistic existence obeys the divine ordinance, that is, it operates in accordance with the laws of nature. To understand the truth is to understand the order, or the laws. One effect of the comprehension of astronomical operations and secrets of nature on human thinking is the lessening of the sense of 'egoism' in man. Guru Nanak elaborates this view in numerous hymns and stanzas bequeathed to us :

He who recognizes the Ordinance, Says Nanak,  
Never shall assert his ego again.

*(Japji)*

Guru Nanak formulated yet another philosophic proposition

in reply to a question put by the *siddhas*. He said : "The world came into being through the sense of individuation." Man's ego being a separatist force, distinctions between one and another, between the self and the world are maintained so long as one's sense of individuality keeps him in the dark. The world continues to exist in the mind of a man as a separate entity, because the sense of individuation prevents him from identifying himself with the Cosmic Being. The central issue of Guru Nanak's theology is the establishment of a link or communion between the finite consciousness and the Infinite, between the self and the all-pervasive Spirit.

Guru Nanak in his description of the Absolute is drawing on his mystical experience and insight. He is not analysing the reality of his vision intellectually; he is simply asserting what he believes to be the content of reality and gives us glimpses of it in his works. He presents pictures of two states of the Absolute, the pre-cosmic and the cosmic. The former is exclusively the result of his deepest mystic vision, whereas the latter may have been the result of his contemplation, reflection and observation. Of the former, the pre-cosmic 'trance' of the Absolute, no rational account could be given. However much the scriptural texts may claim to reveal, the true nature of such reality, wrapt in itself, is revealed nowhere.

Neither do the Vedas, nor the Semitic texts reveal  
the real mystery.

The Divine has neither a parent, nor offspring, nor a sibling.

He creates all space, and assimilates it too.

He, the fathomless, is impossible to fathom.

(*Maru Solhe*)

### **The Doctrine of Being**

Guru Nanak's doctrine of Being is too subtle and complex for a simple logical formulation. He, as the author of the metaphysically rich devotional poetry, defies all attempts to categorize him as a naturalist or idealist, a monist or pluralist, an essentialist or existentialist. He employs the term *Sach* (truth)



time and again and seems to imply by it the entire existence or cosmos, which, in turn, is an expression of the hidden reality or the real stuff. This reality is 'Being' of Guru Nanak's conception. But being is not taken in the sense of a most abstract category, equal to zero. The whole emphasis seems to be centred on the *power* of Being, its creativity, its potentiality of manifestation. Truth, in fact, is the medium that links together the human consciousness and the Supreme Being, and Truth is the facet of the Absolute known to the human mind as God. "Being and truth are lost if they cannot be applied to God any more, and God is lost if Being is mere objectivity and truth mere subjectivity."—(Paul Tillich)

In Guru Nanak's metaphysical system, God occupies the central place, and the idea of a formless, supreme, absolute Power dominates the system as a whole. Beginning from the very *Mul-mantra* and right through the *Japji*, the *Assa-di-Var*, the *Siddha-Goshti*, the *Solhe* and other texts, he maintains a specific ontological and cosmological viewpoint about the character of such a Being. The vast, boundless cosmos, the suns and the moons 'moving across the void endlessly', and other natural phenomena are all His creation; they obey His Will and are governed by His Ordinance. This view of the Absolute as the basic and central reality raises the problem of its congruity with a world-view in which man is the centre. "The growing lack of rapport between those who are God-centred and those who are man-centred has been widely noticed and poses one of the chief difficulties for thinkers who want to achieve a rapprochement between theistic and humanistic values."—(Louis Z. Hammer). Some of the thinkers have tried to provide a 'base for common thought' by speaking of religion as man's 'ultimate concern'. It would be interesting to find out if Guru Nanak's metaphysics and theology are compatible with a humanist interpretation, where God, cosmos and all the rest become *man's* concern.

### The Pre-cosmic State

The poetic text, the *Solhe*, in *Maru raga* is rich in cosmological formulations. Here, the Transcendent Being during its

pre-cosmic condition, is shown seated in a 'trance' for countless ages. There was nothing but absolute void, endless chaos and nebulous darkness all over. No form, no place, no time did exist. The principle of creation did not operate at all.

For aeons there was nothing but chaos,  
There was neither the earth, nor the sky,  
Only the Infinite Will prevailed.

Then suddenly, by the will of the Transcendent Lord, says Guru Nanak, the universe sprang into being out of the void. The principles (or gods) of creation, sustenance and annihilation were produced to carry on the evolutionary operations through the agency of five elements. "~~By creating the universe, its regions and its worldly divisions, He from the Absolute Essence became the Manifest Truth.~~" The cosmos is thus only an image of Him; He stages the play as He likes.

The macrocosmic existence has evolved from one, simple but potential power of Being. It may be asserted, on the basis of Guru Nanak's ontology and cosmology, that all phenomenal development has been from simplicity to complexity, from singularity to multiplicity. The primal substance, or the ultimate basis of all forms in space-time, was one formless Essence, which, though it permeates all creation, transcends the existential forms. "Even within the formula of the physical cosmos there is an ascending series in the scale of matter which leads us from the more to the less dense, from the less to the more subtle."—(Sri Aurobindo). But the most supra-ethereal subtlety, or the highest term in that series is not a void, for in Guru Nanak's ontology, as in Aurobindo's, "there is no such thing as absolute void or real nullity, and what we call by that name is simply something beyond the grasp of our sense, our mind or our most subtle consciousness." The ineffable character of the supra-natural Being is repeatedly emphasized in the Guru's compositions, in keeping with the basic Indian thought.

### **The Cosmic Order**

Guru Nanak cautions man against pretending to know and describe the extent of God's creation. Letters of alphabet avail

not; words fail to 'count the attributes of the Countless'. Human knowledge of the divine truth can never be perfect, unless the seeker develops wisdom and vision following the instruction of a spiritual teacher. Though none can claim to acquire an insight into the 'mystery of the One'—since the One alone knows it—, "whosoever gets a glimpse of the secret of the One, attains to the status of the Divine."—(*Onkar*)

The 'cosmic order' of Guru Nanak's vision is immeasurably large; its objects are countless. Of the numerous stanzas, one in the composition *Japji* presents the chain of thought picturesquely :

There are worlds beyond worlds below  
and innumerable worlds above.  
We have grown weary of finding their limit :  
this is what the Vedas say  
And the Western Books put it at eighteen thousand,  
but that, too, in reality comes to the same thing.  
The count could be given, if there were a count.

(*Trans. Teja Singh*)

The immensity of God's creation is, indeed, puzzling. Modern science, five centuries after Guru Nanak, confirms on the basis of the specialized readings and calculations that what man *knows* of the universe is only its fringe. And the more we know, the less we really know, for the real nature of the 'galaxies in flight' and the details of their contours and contents are most likely to remain a big secret for the earthly creature, Man.

One of the other secrets that have provoked men in all ages to probe, relates to the 'hour of creation'.—

As for the beginning, one can talk only  
in terms of wonder :  
The Absolute Void then abided in itself.

(*Siddha-Goshti*)

What (was) the season and the month  
When this frame of the universe was created ?  
The Pandits have not discovered the time,

even if there be a Puranic record about it.  
 Nor is it found by the Qazis  
 who write the Quranic texts.  
 No Yogi knows the date,  
 None knows the season and the month.  
 The Creator alone knows when the world was made.

(Japji, Trans. Teja Singh)

### One and Many

Dualism between the 'fundamental reality' and the 'perceptible manifold' is as old as philosophy itself. The idea of the One without a second, or the One of all ones, is suggested in the *Vedas*. The Pure Being, Consciousness and Bliss are shown as identical in the *Upanishads*; the manifold has no actual position in the Absolute, it is just in the nature of a mirage in the desert. "It is a mere superimposition that disappears with the dawning of the knowledge of Reality."—(Satprakashananda). The Vedantic philosopher treats oneness of reality not metaphysically alone; he views it from the angle of human knowledge as well. "To find unity in diversity is the great goal of knowledge. It is the one aim of science, philosophy and religion. While different sciences seek unity in their respective spheres, philosophy seeks the unity of all unities. The end of religion is the realization of the ultimate Oneness."

The first word of Guru Nanak's *mul-mantra*, viz. 'Onkar' is prefixed by the numeral '1' (one). It thus becomes "Ik Onkar", i.e., One Creator-Protector. *Onkar* is a variation of 'Om' (*aum*) of the ancient Indian scriptures (with a slight change in its orthography), implying the "seed-force that evolves as the universe." It is the first manifestation of His omniscience, or "the embodiment of cosmic consciousness that appears as the diversified universe through names and forms."—(Satprakashananda). *Onkar* is not the pre-creation void, or absolute aspect of Reality; it is the creative aspect, and the immanent aspect, essentially related to Existence. *Onkar* becomes *Ekankar*, i.e., one absolute unconditioned Being or Power that has no rival and is present everywhere.

Onkar in relation to existence implies plurality, since the phenomenal framework consists of countless objects and events; but its substitute Ekankar definitely implies singularity in spite of the seeming multiplicity of existence. Both 'one' and 'many' aspects of Reality are sought to be unified in the concept of *Ekankar*, though the dominant aspect depicted in the composition '*Ramkali Onkar*' is its 'many' aspect.

The concept involved is inseparably associated with the idea of 'creativity', even though the letters a, u, m of *aum* have also been explained as signifying the three principles of creation, sustenance and annihilation, or Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva deities, each dealing with one definite aspect of the phenomenal world. Guru Nanak seems to imply that Onkar, in its essential act of creativity, creates the manifold universe, projects it, and, in course of time, annihilates it. Since he is immanent in his creation, the existing universe with its multiple names and forms is the perceptible aspect of the Divine Power, which, of course, is singular. Thus, the prefix 'one' refers to the Absolute. The plural universe or existence is knowable; that is why existence or creation is equivalent to Truth. But the Essence or Pure Being that Reality is, remains a mystery to the human mind that speculates about its character. In any case, it is not zero, or void, or *sunya*. Since existence could not come out of a cipher, what is 'real' cannot be simply a zero; only a null-class can be a member of the zero-class. Guru Nanak, therefore, preferred the use of numeral '1' to designate the absolute character of Pure Being; when manifested it assumes the form of a universe with countless objects and events that comprise the Truth, or Onkar.

### **The Real and the True**

Guru Nanak did not dismiss the framework of phenomenal existence as merely an illusion, or a dream, or untruth. The Divine Essence is aglow in material forms, the real is peeping through the true. His poetry portrays the real as the true, and the true as the real. Phenomenally, the Divine is Truth; mystically and speculatively, He is the sole fundamental Reality.

Truth is Onkar, *Ishwar*, and immanent; Reality is Absolute, *Sat*, and transcendent. Both form a union of Reality-Truth, Ik-Onkar, or Sat-Nam.

The doctrine of Guru Nanak linking the transcendent and the immanent has the support of earlier as well as of later thinkers. The transcendental aspect of the ultimate Being is like the *brain* in the human organism, which constitutes the 'higher' part of the nervous system. Though separate from the lower nervous system, yet it is connected with each and every organ, bestowing a unity on the whole organism. The Transcendent, while maintaining its existence and status, is immanent throughout the cosmos. Without its unifying 'current' the existence would merely be individual particles of lifeless matter, with no interlinks, no internal relations, and no coherence. Guru Nanak, for one, would not entertain such an absolute pluralism, or a theory of external relations alone. His Supreme Lord is both independent of and present in the universe as its imperceptible *essence*.

Nanak, the poet of the *Assa-di-Var*, shows his God as the author of nature, as the self-installed power equivalent to total creation or Name (*Nam*). His distinguished disciple, Guru Angad, put the Sikh metaphysics tersely and pithily :

This universe is the abode of Truth;  
The True One resides herein.

Nature operates as Necessity, in the form of inexorable laws. But the Creator of Nature joyously 'looks on'. He is identical with His creation, yet He is detached and transcendent. All our perception, knowledge and wisdom are possible through His power. He can be seen and experienced through nature. But if we look at nature as a mere existent phenomenon, all the objects and events of the world are false and illusory. We ourselves are untrue and are in love with what is untrue (*koor*). It is the Divine essence that makes the world true. If we ignore that essence and confine our attention only to the physical phenomena, we are deluded and remain unaware of the mystery (*vidan*), consciousness of which is essential to the realization of man's true destiny (*bhag*).

### The Absolute and Human Values

Guru Nanak's compositions present two orders of values, one in the form of the highest attributes of the Supreme Reality, the other as the ideals of human life. The first order of values, though posited by the human mind, is not meant for human realization as such. What is an attribute of the Absolute (e.g. eternity or truth) can, at best, be a value for human beings in the form of 'harmony' or 'communion' with one aspect or other of Reality. The second order of values directly pertains to man. Whereas the values of the first order belong to an ontological realm and come to man as revelation or speculative knowledge, the values of the second order fall within the scope of human pursuit and promotion in human life.

A religious leader, while agreeing with social philosophers that values are 'interests' from a human point of view, would, nevertheless, assert that values ultimately reside in the Divine. His appeal is more to faith than to an analytic intellect. He believes that "there are certain vital values of religion which are met by the character of God as wisdom, love and goodness." In this sense, adds Dr Radhakrishnan : "Values acquire a cosmic importance and ethical life becomes meaningful."

Even though God is the first and last in all discussion of value in Guru Nanak's hymns, His value is *for* man and not in itself. All teaching and exhortation for spiritual enhancement is addressed to man and the entire poetry of the *Adi-Granth*, in the final analysis, is meant to serve as food for thought for human beings. The promotion of intellectual, aesthetic, moral and spiritual values in human life is the dominant theme running through the pages of the *Granth*. In the words of Sardar Kapur Singh, "In Sikhism, while it is recognised that the highest religious experience is unmoral and belongs to a category of value which is not ethical, it is nevertheless stressed that without strict ethical purity of conduct there is no possibility of an advance in the religious experience. A religious life, not strictly grounded in ethical conduct, or a religious discipline which ignores the

ethical requirements, is considered in Sikhism a great error.” Guru Nanak made a public declaration to the effect that “ethical conduct is the only true foundation of human life on earth.”

The cardinal ethical virtues propounded in Guru Nanak’s hymns, and in the *Adi-Granth* as a whole, are (1) truthfulness, (2) contentment, and (3) true wisdom, or *sat*, *santokh*, *gyan* (or *vichar*). The first one, truthfulness (in the sense of integrity, fidelity and the pursuit of truth as one’s goal of life, is accorded a status even higher than truth itself. The second virtue, contentment (*santokh*), is a variation of and an improvement upon temperance, one of Plato’s Cardinal Virtues. Its application puts a limit on individual passions, frenzy, hate, rage and infatuation. It recommends the cutting short of greed and worldly attachments necessary for regulating desires directed towards personal gain. The virtue further implies a control over egoism, self-centredness and self-aggrandizement. The aim is to prepare the individual for acts of benevolence, by controlling and minimizing self-love. The third virtue, wisdom (meaning the acquisition of spiritual knowledge, practice of reflection and contemplation), corresponds to Plato’s first Cardinal Virtue of the same name. The acid test of virtue in an individual has been put down as ‘humility’ (sweet modesty), which as the ‘essence of all virtues and goodness’ is not simply ‘bowing one’s head’, but the inculcation of charity in one’s heart.

### Nature of the Self

The framework of Guru Nanak’s view of human nature was furnished by the ancient Indian thought, which held man to be the ‘abode of gods’, or a link between the inward reality and the outward phenomena. A verse in the *Mahabharata* tells the ‘secret of the Brahma : there is nothing higher than man’. He alone provides the ‘clue to nature’s mysteries’, since in him are united all the levels of reality. A comparable view was held by the Orphics in ancient Greece. “Man,” they said, “is a child of earth and of the starry heaven;” or in more recent language, a combination of God and beast, “which means a mixture of god



and devil.”—(Russell). With Greek philosophers, man as a rational being was the measure of all things. In Indian philosophy, *Brahman* (the Absolute) is such a measure, though man has been treated as the centre of the universe. Says Radhakrishnan : “The two elements of selfhood, uniqueness (eachness) and universality (all-ness) grow together until at last the most unique becomes the most universal.” Guru Nanak talks in terms of the ego and the *atman* (spiritual principle), which represent the lower and the higher parts of the self, or the physical and spiritual aspects of man.

Indian philosophy is not alone in holding the view of the origin of man from an absolute Being, and his inward pull for a return to the Absolute. Guru Nanak, who imbibed the essential spirit of the Indian thesis, may quite well be appreciated by the West, since the thesis is shared and supported by a number of Western thinkers. Arising from the absolute Being, man as an existential individual is differentiated by his egoism. The Sikh Gurus even go to the extent of remarking that it is the ego that causes the world to come into existence. Their major emphasis seems to be on making a distinction between the Self, which is a unifying force, and the ego which separates an individual from others. The former is of the essence of the one universal Spirit, whereas the latter is the root-cause of the multiplicity of objects and personalities in the world. Egoism, according to Guru Nanak’s conception, is an equivalent of *avidya* (ignorance), or *maya* of the Vedantic conception. Its ‘veil of falsehood’ must, therefore, be rent in order to proceed in the direction of the true self.

### Man and the Universe

Guru Nanak’s metaphysics is not complete without the assertions of a possible synthesis of “I” and “Brahman”. The two are harmonized or united in an experience that smacks of Advaita Vedanta. When the phalanx of untruth is broken, when ignorance vanishes, and full knowledge of the cosmic and supra-cosmic reality dawns upon human consciousness, a new

equilibrium is established between the self and Brahman; the individual attains to the level of a *brahma-gyani*.

Theologians interpret 'union' of the finite and the Infinite in two different ways. Since there is an affinity between the structure of the world and the mind of man, the two can be united either in the sense of identification of the self with God, or in the sense of absorption of the divine elements in the human self. If the self is just like a drop, it would be reasonable to expect its merger in the ocean of Eternal Being, losing its finite identity for ever. Such a view of synthesis has been attributed to Guru Nanak by several interpreters and scholars. Though an identification of this nature is beyond the comprehension of man, it is not completely beyond his imagination.

The other type of union is one that is accomplished in the human soul. Its chief merit is keeping the individual intact and alive biologically, while the experience of the 'merger' takes place spiritually. It is not necessarily the drop that enters the ocean and gets lost in the latter's vastness, but it is equally possible for the vast ocean to flow into the individual stream of consciousness. According to Guru Nanak, the result is identical :

The drop is contained in the ocean

The ocean in the drop...

(*Ramkali*)

Guru Nanak's conception of the relationship between God and man is based on a specific psychological technique. Man must make effort to reduce egoism and make room for virtue and higher consciousness. Such a *guru*-oriented individual (*gurmukh*) would gradually acquire a vision of higher and higher truth, and ultimately of a cosmic consciousness leading to the realization of the One without a rival. Man, then, would be like the One 'from whom he emanated'. Man, like Leibniz's monads, mirrors the universe. He does not mirror, however, the physical aspect of it, the space and time of it; rather he mirrors the mysterious and ideal aspect. His principle of intelligence points to the unique gifts he has acquired from the Supreme Intelligence,

the origin and source of all human excellence.

The world of humanist thought, on the other hand, starts from the fact of human existence. The world, the sun, the stars and the galaxies may have existed before the advent of earthly life and man; but that is just one of the *inferences* made by the thinking mind, on the basis of impressions received in the brain. If the mind and the brain did not exist, would there be a possibility of 'perception' or 'experience' and would there be any 'inference' regarding the existence of a universe in the past or in the present? The humanist thinker, it appears, is tied down to a psychological point of view, which may be contrasted with the standpoint of physics, which sees the rise of humanity to be a 'curious accident' and its career a 'mere episode in cosmic history'. Man, figuratively expressed in terms of a brief footnote at the end of the world's book, can claim existence for a twinkling of an eye measured against the 'inconceivably long vista of time'.

According to Guru Nanak's teaching, the realization of an ever-expanding wisdom is the goal of life-on-earth, of which the Guru speaks in terms of *Brahma-gyan* and *Jivan-mukti*. Others have variously characterized it as gnosis, intuitive realization of union with the Infinite Consciousness, 'I am Brahman' or 'Thou art That'. All of them point to the illumination of the human spirit, which may be possible to attain by following one of the methods prescribed by the illuminated teachers of humanity. The way of life that Guru Nanak's philosophy inspires is *Nam-Marga*, calculated to effect a synthesis of the human soul with the traditional divinity of *Sat-Chit-Anand*.

### **The Way of Life**

The characterization of the Absolute-cum-Lord and the clarification of metaphysical concepts, attempted in Guru Nanak's *Siddha-Goshti* and elsewhere, are all motivated by an earnest concern for human welfare. It is true the individual comes into and goes out of the world as 'ordained', but to recognize the ordinance, the spirit and source of the ordinance, is human duty,

to be performed under the instructions of an enlightened teacher. It is the 'guru' who indicates the path to final equipoise, the blissful state of *sehaj*, after attaining which the 'self wanders no more'. "There one enjoys unending consciousness of the Eternal Lord, who has staged the play of creation, and abides in all ages."

Guru Nanak's philosophy of values inspires man to transcend his mundane existence through the practice of contemplation (*nam-simrin*) combined with service (*seva*), without renouncing the world, without practising austerities, or without adopting mysticism as a formal creed. The Guru recommends to man those values that prepare him for a worthy corporate life, and for 'communion' with the essence of Reality. He recommends a judicious utilization of the material and cultural resources at the disposal of man, as against involvement in the temptations and allurements of life.

Were my palace built of rubies,  
Were it jewel-inlaid,  
Were it full of pleasing flavours,  
Were it fragrance-made:  
Let me not be lost in these  
Lest I forget Thy Name !

(*Sri Raga*)

The ideal man of the *siddhas* was one who abandoned home and worldly life, who indulged in specific exercises and bodily disciplines, in order to become part of the 'Void'. The Guru differed with them. The ideal conduct, he insisted, consisted in leading a life of non-attachment, exemplified by the lotus that lives in water undetached, and the duck that floats over the stream, yet keeping its plumage dry and ready to take a flight away from the surface of water. Man may live in the world, participate in its daily routine, but should not obsess himself with its affairs.—

Cursed is the life that is lived  
Only to eat and swell the belly.

(*Suhi Var*)

The *yogis* believed that the 'Void' resided in three points—inside the self, outside of it and in the three spheres of the world. The Guru remarked that the 'Fourth Void' was all-important; the essential spirit of Being fills all places. Rejecting the nihilist position that 'Nothing' existed : it was all void, the Guru brought home the fact that a 'void' is to be created in one's heart by emptying it of all egoistic desire in order to make room for the positive essence to enter and reside in it.—

He alone is emancipated-in-life  
Who is rid of ego inside.

(*Maru*)

Such truly emancipated, valiant and enlightened spirits (the *jodhas* and the *bhaktas*) become the true benefactors of humanity, for they are the ones who have realized the true import of Guru Nanak's metaphysics :

I perceive Thy form in all life and light.  
I realize Thy power in all spheres and sight.

(*Assa*)

## Supreme Reality in Guru Nanak's Philosophy

Guru Nanak's characterization of the Supreme Reality as *Purakh* (person) is significantly indicative of his faith in the creative powers, consciousness and freedom of the Divine. "Personality is the most emphasized ideal of modern religious and secular humanism," according to Paul Tillich. "Personality is considered as the most necessary symbol for God. God is even described as the person in whom all human perfections are perfectly embodied." In the opening phrases of Guru Nanak's *Mul-mantra* the Divine Being is symbolized as Person. Ontologically, this establishes two variations of 'being', one absolute or cosmic, the other human or personal. Truth shares the character both of supra-human being and of human existence, that is, both the macrocosmic and the microcosmic being. In other words, Truth stands midway between man and the supra-personal reality.

It may be asserted, on the basis of Guru Nanak's ontology and cosmology, that the macrocosmic existence has evolved out of one, simple but potential power of Being, that all phenomenal development has been from simplicity to complexity, from singularity to multiplicity. The primal substance, or the ultimate basis of all forms, was the one formless Essence, which, though it permeates all creation, yet transcends the existentialist forms. In Guru Nanak's ontology, as in Sri Aurobindo's, "there is no such thing as absolute void or real nullity and what we call by that name is simply something beyond the grasp of our sense, our mind or our most subtle consciousness." The ineffable character of the supra-natural being is repeatedly emphasized in the Guru's verses. This is in keeping with the basic Indian spiritual thought.

Even if a Brahman-conscious individual gets a quintessence of the real nature of Reality, he cannot adequately describe it in human terms; he cannot transmit the 'experience' of the Absolute Being to another who is lower in the scale of spiritual evolution.

This leads us to the levels of being of humans. "The oldest Vedantic knowledge tells us of five degrees of our being, the material, the vital, the mental, the ideal, the spiritual or beatific and to each of these grades of our soul there corresponds a grade of our substance, a sheath as it was called in the ancient figurative language." One may analyse the human personality into three broad divisions, namely, physical, vital and spiritual. Body-mind-spirit combination has been a favourite with the humanist writers. Guru Nanak's approach to the being of man practically corresponds to this scheme. At the organic level, the individual is exhorted to understand the world and the spiritual law and pay heed to the teachings of the preceptor. At the mental level he is asked to develop his logical, reflective and aesthetic faculties. Here his interest is mainly oriented inward. At the third level his interest again shifts outward, since he has attained spiritual consciousness; armed with the highest wisdom and perspective, he can serve humanity in practice. This is the level of spiritual effort or 'ethical truth'; it is the realm of human fulfilment, beyond which abides the Formless or *Nirankar*. Thus, the ultimate level of being, both in human and cosmic orders, is the same, viz., the Absolute. So long as the seeker remains a 'person', he can have communion with the Person, the supreme principle of consciousness operating in the cosmos. He lives in perfect harmony with Nature and in tune with supra-natural order of Being. This is the stage of *nirvana*, or *jivan-mukti*, or salvation-in-life. This is the order of being of one possessed of cosmic consciousness (called *Brahman-gyan* in Guru Nanak's terminology), where the spirit is illuminated by the light of Being itself.

"It is a commonplace of metaphysics that God's knowledge cannot be discursive but must be intuitive," says William James. Among the marks of mystic experience, he accords first place to

ineffability, since the experience of reality defies complete expression. The mystical states, "more like states of feeling than like states of intellect," are "states of insights into depths of truths unplumbed by the discursive intellect." Guru Nanak in his description of the Absolute is drawing on his mystical experience and insight. He is not analysing the reality of his vision intellectually; he is simply asserting what he believes to be the content of reality and gives us glimpses of it in his works. He presents pictures of two states of the Absolute: the pre-cosmic and the cosmic. The former is exclusively the result of his deepest mystic vision, whereas the latter may have been the result of his contemplation, reflection and observation. Of the former, the pre-cosmic 'trance' of the Absolute, no rational account could be given. However much the scriptural texts may claim to reveal, the true nature of such reality, wrapt in itself, is revealed nowhere :

Neither do Vedas, nor the Semitic texts reveal  
the real mystery.

The Divine has neither a parent, nor offspring, nor sibling.  
He creates all space, and assimilates it too;  
He, the fathomless, is impossible to fathom.

*(Maru Solhe)*

The pre-cosmic state of the Absolute must have been a chaos  
and a void :

Neither was then the sky, Nor the earth, nor the world,  
nor the underworld;

No, neither the celestial regions, nor the nether regions;  
nor death, nor time;

Neither being nor becoming, nor heaven nor hell,  
neither coming nor going.

Neither was there the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva;  
No, there was not another but the One Absolute Lord.

*(Maru; Trans. G.S.)*

Such Absolute Being must have been the potentiality of all  
creation; otherwise which was the power and source of creation



if not Absolute itself ? In its cosmic aspect, the Absolute is 'the whole' that is. It is not very different from the Hegelian absolute whole 'in all its complexity'. The character of this absolute is spiritual. "The nature of Spirit may be understood by contrasting it with its opposite, namely Matter. The essence of matter is gravity; the essence of spirit is Freedom. ...Spirit is self-contained existence." This absolute is a 'pure act of existing'; that is, the whole reality is unlike any other object (including man). No object is such an eternal act of absolute existence, or Being. Guru Nanak designated the whole truth by the numeral 1 (one). We cannot add anything to the one absolute reality, for everything is already a part of the whole. Nor can we subtract anything from it. How can we separate a thing from the whole, and where we can place a thing outside the whole ? Thus the whole reality can neither be diminished, nor added to by an external agency; and there can be no external agency either.

This 'One' which is also the *Onkar*, that is, creativity and creation as a whole, is *Sat* or permanent Being, manifesting itself in existing objects and operations of Nature, names and forms in space-time, collectively designated *Nam*. This is the Whole Truth in Guru Nanak's view. The absolute reality expressing itself in the absolute *truth*, without the aid of an external agency, without casting itself in the womb of a parent, assumes the character of supreme consciousness, and supreme freedom. Being itself is consciousness and Being itself is Freedom. No other power or authority wields control over it; it is not subjected to pressure, command or fear of any other force. It is fearless (*Nirbhau*), that is, without outside control, which implies Freedom, Delight or pure Bliss. Nor is such a being contradicted by any other being, entity or object. The principle of contradiction does not apply to the absolute Principle of all principles, since the automatic, pure act of existing is not subject to logical principles enunciated by the human mind. We may posit a 'non-being' as a contradictory of 'being' in logic, but we cannot conceive the existence of a non-being entity. That is why, the absolutely real is without enmity or opposition.

The Absloute of Guru Nanak may, therefore, be viewed as much from the universe's standpoint, as from the pre-cosmic angle. He as the principle of creation, consciousness and delight is manifestly plural, since the objects of the world and species of animate being are numerous and multiple. We cannot deny a pluralism to Guru Nanak's metaphysics, which takes into account both the singular power of Being or Essence, and the multiple manifestation of Truth or Existence. This metaphysics is monistic, at the same time admitting a pluralistic view of creation. Said William James : "I think, in fact, that a final philosophy of religion will have to consider the pluralistic hypothesis more seriously than it has hitherto been willing to consider it." Perhaps William James was unaware of Guru Nanak's philosophy of religion. All the worlds, the suns and moons, all the stars and galaxies, and all that could be imagined and inferred in the universe, constitute an integral whole, a totality, which is expressed by the Guru in *Ik-Onkar*, i.e, 'Manifest Being that is One'. What is manifest is not a blank unity; so, pluralism is inherent in this monistic metaphysics.

## Guru Nanak's Five Realms of Truth

A rare identity of metaphysics and ethics is achieved in the consummate stanzas of the *Japji*, Guru Nanak's well-known poetic composition accorded first place in the *Adi-Granth*. In that composition have been listed the following five stages of spiritual progress, which are at the same time the degrees of the Supreme Reality mystically intuited by the Guru :

(1) Realm of the Law (*Dharma Khand*) : This is the plane of Perceptual Truth, consisting of the common-sense world, or the physical-social environment of man, experienced through the senses. This level of reality is characterized by 'facts' correlated to human awareness by means of sense-perception. This is the empirical level of the truth given in human consciousness as 'nights, days, seasons, the elements, and the earth'. In describing this realm, the Guru speaks of the countless species of the biological world and the immense variety of objects perceived :

Inhabited by numerous kinds of beings and species,  
Bearing various names, forms and qualities.

The moral quality involved, at this stage, consists in the effort to cognize the 'law' or the operations of the world around, governed by the principle of Causation. The same law operates in the sphere of human actions, which are judged on merit in the 'court' of the True One.

(2) Realm of Knowledge (*Gyan Khand*) : This is an extension of the plane of perceptual truth, though more appropriately it is

the plane of Logical Truth. What cannot be observed perceptually, may be inferred or constructed logically. Remote operations of the universe as well as the working of the depths of the microcosm are grasped by the human mind, and are reflected in pluralistic theories formulated by the philosophers and scientists. The multiplicity of entities existing in nature is expressed by Guru Nanak in the *Japji*, *Assa-di-Var* and elsewhere; he refers to 'countless the worlds beneath, countless the worlds above', and to the myriad of the suns, the moons and the stars 'moving billions of miles without end'. At the level of Gyan Khand, there are :

Many the Indras, many the suns and moons  
Many the countries, many the heavenly regions

\* \* \*

Many the norms of life  
Many the forms of speech  
Many the princes, many the queens and kings  
Many the thinking minds, many the serving men  
Nanak : the count of beings has no end.

(3) Realm of Creativity (*Sarm Khand*) : This is the level of Metaphysical Truth, characterized by aesthetico-spiritual experience, or poetic imagination, where all sense of multiplicity and plurality fades away, giving place to awareness of oneness and sense of wonder. Here, harmony reigns supreme ; intellectual analysis yields ground to realization of synthesis and unity. A heightened sense of reality prevails, which re-forms the ordinary senses into those possessed by the visionaries and seers :

Here, consciousness and intellect are re-fashioned  
Here is the mind illuminated afresh  
Here is the reason reconstituted  
And here is gifted the vision of gods and supermen.

(4) Realm of Action (*Karam Khand*) : This level of Ethical Truth is characterized by 'strength' (*jor*). The seeker, fortified by the powers acquired through reflection and intuition at the earlier stages, is endowed with moral strength and true wisdom,

which turn him into a valiant spirit :

Here are the heroes brave and mighty  
Brimming with the thought of the Almighty

\* \* \*

Here are devotees from all lands and climes  
Who rejoice, blessed with Truth in their minds.

Ethically, this is the stage of fulfilment, the stage where bliss is the reward of virtue. Metaphysically, this is the realm of values, which cannot be separated from the human pursuit of truth, and hence from moral conduct. The all-inclusive comprehensive sphere of human and divine values is not only a distinct advance over the purely intellectual and aesthetic orders of the truth, but it integrates the orders of values in a polyphasic unity of a higher order.

(5) Realm of the Spirit (*Sach Khand*) : This is the region of Divine Truth, or spiritual identification with the timeless, transcendent Being, having its counterpart of immanence :

There in the Sach-Khand are universes, regions and spheres  
No count of which be possible, if one may try.  
There, worlds upon worlds and endless forms,  
As he ordains, so they perform.

The realm of Spirit is beyond description. The individual, who becomes in tune with the core of Reality, unknown to others falling short of complete identification, may have a glimpse of it. Here, perhaps, is the mystic element in the scheme. An all-out effort on the part of the seeker is absolutely essential for making a headway in the direction of truth-consciousness of the highest order. On this path of spiritual evolution, each successive stage is important in itself. The individual who has aspired to make progress and has entered upon the first level of awareness of the truth is commended by the Guru as *Sachiar*, as much as the one who has already drunk himself from the fountain of fulfilment.

Truth, it seems, is a matter of degree. In all probability, every system of knowledge falls short of the absolute level of

truth, though one system may exhibit a higher degree of truth than another. At any rate no theory of knowledge or discussion of methodology can dispense with the taking of a position on the question of truth. In the main, three different views or theories of the truth have been current in the recent developments of epistemology. These are :

(1) **Pragmatic theory of Truth :** The theory, in the hands of John Dewey, substitutes 'warranted assertability' for the truth, which is another name for expediency, practicalism, or instrumentalism. Initiated by Charles Peirce and remodelled by William James, Pragmatism as a theory of truth, represents truth as a 'successful adjustment between human purposes and the environment; it is man-made and subject to human limitations. If the adjustment varies, the truth also will vary.' In its moderate form, the theory comes near to the view of truth as 'verifiability', advocated by the logical empiricists.

2) **Correspondence theory of Truth :** This theory, held by the realists, 'has the merit of insisting that there are independent facts to which our beliefs, if they are to be true, must conform. This interpretation accords with both the commonsense and the objective methods of science'. But 'facts' are not always possible to perceive; they are also to be inferred and judged. The theory does not deal adequately with judgment and inference. The chief merit of the theory, however, is that it separates 'facts' from 'statements'. 'Facts do not figure in *discourse* except as true statements'.

(3) **Coherence theory of Truth :** The theory, supported by the idealists, treats the whole of reality as a system or unity, and the truth of a proposition depends upon its coherence with the whole system of propositions. It can be accepted that coherence is an important *test* of the truth, but defining truth exclusively in terms of coherence is perhaps going too far. 'Knowledge must be not only coherent but anchored to what is independently real'.

The question arises, to which of the theories of the truth does Guru Nanak's position accord ? Firstly, the stage of

Dharma-Khand or Factual Truth seems to go well with the Pragmatic theory of truth, where truth is intimately related to the practical consequences. Secondly, the description of Gyan Khand, or the scientific realm of truth, nicely fits in with the Correspondence theory, since the truth of scientific formulations or 'laws' depends upon their capacity to represent real occurrences. The theory also lends support to pluralism which is characteristic of the Gyan Khand. Thirdly, the stage of Sarm Khand or metaphysical truth, where the inter-related whole or systematic totality of the universe is primary and real, accords well with the Coherence theory of truth. Here, the integral and aesthetico-spiritual level finds expression in the portrayal of metaphysics.

But, Guru Nanak's doctrine of Truth reaches out towards a larger framework, where the stage of Karam-Khand or Ethical Truth demands a value-theory of Truth. Here the greatest truth is the service of fellow human beings, and the highest ideal their welfare. Truth comes to acquire the status of the supreme value, the ultimate that may be realized in human life. Once realized, the truth transforms the seeker into a hero of humanity, or a superman. And Truth itself is transformed into 'truthfulness', which is rated by Guru Nanak even higher than the truth. Beyond this living state of the truth (i.e. truthful conduct), or the state of divine grace, or fulfilment, is the matrix of space-time; an earthly being cannot perhaps aspire to cross this spatio-temporal limit during his life-time. For, further beyond is only the Formless, Absolute, or in the language of Guru Nanak, the Nirankar, the resident of Sach Khand.

## Guru Nanak's Theory of Knowledge

In any question of technique and method in the field of metaphysics and theology, discussion of the epistemological position is indispensable in order to find out the 'how' aspect of knowledge. The answer of science, so far as it deals with the world, points to 'perception', on the assumption that the world is *knowable*. Albert Einstein once said : "The most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is comprehensible."\* Perception or objective knowledge is no doubt a psychological fact; the subjective *experience* comes first and knowledge of facts comes afterwards. Causally, a happening occurs in the universe independently of the existence of a perceiving individual : only the sense-data come to affect a living organism. However, epistemologically the 'experience' of the happening is a primary and incontrovertible fact. The occurrence may be real or it may be an illusion or just an hallucination. Nevertheless, the mental experience of it is real and certain. The term *experience* in this context includes empirical, inferential, intuitive and mystical awareness and insight. Such a use of the term would admit wisdom, gnosis and quintessence of reality in the scope of knowledge.

A theory of knowledge can be based on perception and logical inference, or it may be based on other types of experience. It is possible to devise a theory on the basis of hallucination and deny the existence of everything except one's own self. This would produce a kind of solipsism, or absolute skepticism. The Advaita-Vedanta theory of Shankara is based neither on

\*The World As I See It.



perception (in the sense of *true* knowledge) nor on hallucination, but on *illusion*. In modern terminology, illusion is a form of perception: the object or sense-datum exists, but causes an incorrect or mistaken belief about it in the mind of the percipient. *Maya* is thus illusory: it has a source in the real Being, but to the individual, under the spell of his ego or ignorance, it 'appears' as an independent existence. When 'wisdom' dawns on the self of the individual, *Maya* is dispelled, and only the One Reality remains. Even the duality of one's own self and the Supreme Reality disappears and the whole real Being is affirmed as Non-dual or Advaita.

Followers of Shankara's Vedanta doctrine try to read Advaita epistemology in the compositions of Guru Nanak and other composers of the hymns of the *Adi-Granth*. Indeed, a number of stanzas taken independently suggest a theory of knowledge based on *illusion*, according to the school of thought influenced by Advaita, and represented by the *Nirmalas*. The Gurus are interpreted as having dismissed the world of phenomena as merely a false creation of the deluded minds. But a synthesis of assertions scattered over the various parts of the *Granth* helps in the construction of a different outlook. According to the Gurus, the perceptible world is illusory, because that alone is real which can be discerned, not by means of the sense-organs, but through intuitive experience. They speak of the 'inner eyes' that 'see' the Lord. The real substance is the essence which is not perceptible; it can only be inwardly realized. But this does not mean that the world is non-real or non-being. One should try to discern the reality immanent in the phenomena as the Gurus did :

I perceive Thy form in all life and light

I realize Thy power in all spheres and sight.\*

This divine element makes the world real in the spiritual sense though its material aspect is not real. According to the Guru, man must not involve himself with the superficial or material

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\*Guru Nanak : *Aassa Chaupadas* (8) P-351

manifestation of existence; he must strive for experiencing the ideal and transcendent aspect of it. It is man's material values that are listed as 'false' (*koor*).

## 2

Although Guru Nanak did not expound his theory of knowledge systematically like a technical philosopher, an outline of his epistemology, or his view of the divine knowledge, may be formulated. Organic perception has little relevance in his scheme. It is true that the 'word' of the teacher is received through the perceptive process followed by reflection and contemplation. But perception here implies intent listening, faith and intuitive insight, which are the conditions of the divine knowledge. The term 'knowledge' in fact refers to the worldly forms : it is *true wisdom*, or spiritual realization, that belongs to the region of the spirit. Disputatious knowledge is not spiritually important. Knowledge in the ordinary sense furnishes empirical experience to the individual as distinct from the inferential and intuitive experience. When Guru Nanak refers to 'hearing, believing and thinking' (as in the *Japji*), he does not imply ordinary hearing etc., but 'listening' to the very voice of Reality (i.e. *sabda*), 'contemplating' its inner structure represented by the embodiment of the human soul or the microcosm (*pinā*), and attuning oneself to the Spirit immanent in the macrocosm (*brahmand*). The term used by the Guru for cognizing the Essence is *atam-chinan*, i.e., examining and contemplating one's own self in order to 'know' the larger Self. That is the gateway or the first step to the knowledge of Reality. Following teaching of the Guru, one must strive to 'perceive' the truth of the cosmic existence, enshrined in one's self :

Speak of the greatnsss of the True Lord,  
by Guru's grace  
Discern with the eye the Highest of the high,  
by Guru's grace  
Listen by the ear the 'word' of the Lord that prevails,  
And immerse thyself completely in His love.\*

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\*Guru Nanak : *Maru Solhe* (20) P-1041

The higher forms of knowledge are difficult to practise; they require special effort and training. Contemplation of the Divine is not as direct and simple as natural perception is. For the attainment of the spiritual bliss (*maha-ras*), argumentation and the processes of logic and learning are of little avail; they generate only conceit.—

One cannot attain true wisdom by means of arguments  
 To define its essence is too hard a task.  
 One wins it by the grace of the Lord  
 Clever devices, volitions are useless all. (Assa)

It is only when divine wisdom lights up the self that the levels of existence and Being are noticed by man. One is the level of Appearance, the world of fact and form, in which one lives and acts. Here the path of action (*karma*) can guide the seeker, who develops a Utilitarian, humanist moral outlook. Another level is the world of the spirit and divine immanence, in which the seeker partakes by means of devotion (*bhakti*) or love of the divine essence. The third is the level of the Absolute, which is grasped through spiritual knowledge (*jnana*), or illumination of the soul. At this level, the individual self, free from illusion, ceases to exist as a separate entity. Dualism disappears, the self and the Divine are synthesized in a unity of the highest order, leading to the final vision or *darshana*.

Guru Nanak's method of realization does not place exclusive emphasis and reliance upon any one of the courses open to man. A start may be made with the adoption of one course, combining the elements of the other two side by side. Bhakti is not barred to one who decides to act in the interests of the community, nor to one who chooses to expand the area of knowledge and true wisdom. Development of all the three aspects of action, devotion and knowledge, in concert, produces in the personality of man harmony, equipoise and a state of abiding bliss.

Guru Nanak's methodology of the practice of *Nam* (lit. name) is essentially a contemplative way to the realization of spiritual essence of the universe. The way of *Nam* or *Nam-marga* was duly

evolved by him from the traditional *nam-jaap*, i.e. repetition by the tongue of a particular name of God. The main features and stages of the evolved *nam-marga* may be summarized in the following way :

(1) Devotee's practice of *nam* : The process starts with the initiation of an individual at the hands of a *guru* or a spiritual guide, who recommends a constant repetition of the divine name, just like a *mantra* or magical formula. This may be accompanied by counting the beads of a rosary as well. The aim is to produce a state of concentration on the sound (*sabad*); the whole mind is to be occupied by the divine melody which sounds up from within. It is assumed that divinity is already present in one's self; it is to be helped by *nam-simrin* and musical singing to come up and transform the outlook and vision of the devotee. It is essentially an affective state of the mind, without any strong element of ratiocination in it. Says Guru Nanak—

The sound of *nam* brings forth concentration in man,

Concentration leading to gnosis :

The untold story of God is thus revealed.\*

The devotee, on falling in love with the Divine, feels his presence in the heart and derives the utmost joy from it. Contemplation or 'recollection' is comforting to him; 'forgetting the 'name' torments the soul'.†

(2) Reflective aspect of *nam* : Guru Nanak's method caters for the need of thoughtful individuals as well. Time and again he commends reflection and advises 'cognition of the self' (*atam-chinan*). Knower is he who knows himself, and through this knowledge knows the eternal Self. The wisest of the wise is one who meditates on *nam*. At places, the Guru advises against a

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\*Guru Nanak : *Ramkali* (9) P-879

†'Recollection' of God is not an exclusive feature of the Hindu and Sikh faiths. As Sidney Spencer writes in *Mysticism in World Religion* (1966), "In the Koran it is said that 'the gravest duty is the remembrance of God' (29,44); and among the Sufis this duty was fulfilled by the repetition of the name of God or a religious formula, like 'Glory to Allah' or 'There is no God but Allah', accompanied by intense concentration of mind."

show of meditation and publicity to one's religious sentiments. One need not proclaim loudly, but keep it to one's mind—that is the way of meditation. Intellect or wisdom is not at a discount in Guru Nanak's system. He rather upholds it :

Wisdom is not that which is wasted in strife,  
It helps in realizing the Lord,  
Through intellect and wisdom is honour secured.\*

The realization, possible to a layman through devotion and repetition of *nam*, is possible to a thoughtful individual through the use of intellect in discovering deeper meanings of the Guru's teachings. *Nam* not only produces harmony, it carries sense and significance worth pursuing. *Nam* is a *marga* (technique, or *lit.* path) when adopted for spiritual realization; but metaphysically it is equivalent to 'existence' and 'value'. Guru Nanak equates *nam* with truth; *nam* is the entire creation and *nam* is the ideal set before man.

(3) Effortless contemplation or spontaneous meditation: The highest stage of *nam jaap* is that where contemplation of *nam* becomes automatic. The state may be acquired through faith in the Guru who initiates the disciple, or through the use of reasoning in reaching the true import of the Guru's teaching. The state of effortless absorption in *nam* or 'unmeditated meditation' (*ajapa-jaap*), though not so easy to attain in a life full of distractions, is claimed to be within the reach of everyone who aspires to it and vigorously pursues it. When attained it is like the mother's constant concern for the child right through her routine of chores and activities. An invisible link unites the individual with the inner essence of creation, affording him an experience of wonder (*wismad*) and lasting bliss. Here the psychology of man gets transformed. His consciousness is reconstituted and reformed on the pattern of celestial beings or saints (the *suras* and *sidhas*). He is wonder-struck by the sounds, scriptures, species, forms, colours and elements surrounding him.—

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\*G.N. : *Var Sarang* (20.1) P-1245

Looking at the immensity of creation

One gets into a state of ecstasy :

The mystery is revealed when one qualifies for it.\*

This aesthetico-spiritual experience, *wismad*, in the spontaneous contemplation of *nam* is perhaps the highest kind of experience that the seeker of harmony can hope to attain in human life. The attitude of contemplative absorption (*liv*), named *Nam-marga* or *Nam-yoga*, resembles the traditional yogas only in part; in fact, it synthesizes some of their important features. "The synthesis gives us a new *Marga* which, in the light of the terms used in the Granth, should be called *Wismad Marga* on the practical side and *Nam Marga* on the theoretical side."†

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\*Assa-di-Var (3.1)

†Dr Sher Singh : *Philosophy of Sikhism*, 1966

## **Hierarchy of Values in Guru Nanak's Philosophy**

In Guru Nanak's compositions there are two distinct categories of values. One category presents values as highest attributes of the Supreme Reality, the other as the ideals of human life. The first category of values, though a product of the human mind, is not meant for realization by man. The Absolute Power or *Sat-Chit-Anand* is *Ik* (one) and *Onkar* (manifest truth); it is formless and without attributes, yet it appears in forms and attributes. In its Person aspect, he is Consciousness, Creator, self-installed, Uncontradicted, and without external control. These descriptions of the pre-cosmic and cosmic character of Absolute-God are inconceivable in respect of man. It may, however, be possible for man to experience 'union' with reality or *Sat*, and to attain the state of bliss and freedom. But a distinction between Being and human experience of such being cannot be ruled out. An attribute of the Absolute, for instance Eternity or Truth, can serve as a value for human beings only in the form of harmony or communion with one or other aspect of the supreme Reality.

The second category of values, however, belongs to man. If values of the first order fall in the ontological realm and come to man as revelation or speculative knowledge, the values of the second category fall within the scope of human pursuit; i.e. they can be promoted in human life. There may be a positive correlation between values of the first and second orders, as, for instance, between God as Bliss and human state of blissfulness, or God as Truth and human experience of truthfulness. Nevertheless, from

a humanist point of view, the discovery of a set of realizable values recommended by Guru Nanak is more pertinent. These values range from 'enlightenment' to 'love' and 'blissfulness', 'cosmic consciousness' and 'harmony'. In a descending order, the values may be described, in brief, as follows :

(1) Harmony (*Naad*).—This value heads the list of values of Guru Nanak's Spiritual Humanism. In the language of mysticism, this is the state of union or identification with the Divine or Universal Spirit. In Advaita, it is Non-dual consciousness, where 'thou' (the *jiva*) and 'that' (*Ishvara*) become one. In Yogic terms, it is the unstruck melody, or harmony, that sounds in the highest intuition of man. The human individual is in perfect harmony with the Spirit; he or his self is no more; only singularity remains. The phalanx of ignorance is broken, the ego vanishes, the truth of truths dawns for the individual self to realize that all selves are interlinked and integrated into one supreme Self. Endowed with the strength of such vision and fulfilment, the realized one places himself at the service of fellow human beings in whom he discerns the Divine.

(2) Cosmic Consciousness (*Brahma Gyan*).—Whereas Harmony corresponds to Reality (*Sat*), Cosmic Consciousness corresponds to Truth (*Sach*) and Divine Awareness (*Chit*). The human mind, in its highest attainment or peak moment, becomes as wide as the universe; it is enabled to 'know' the inmost secrets of existence. He is responsive to Truth in all its manifestations. Fortified by true wisdom, designated by the symbol 'Veda' in Guru Nanak, the individual turns a 'bhakta', a valiant fighter, or a benevolent teacher and enlightener. The Guru speaks very highly of one who is a true Brahma-Gyani; he rises above the narrow distinctions of creed and caste; he even rises above the limits of here-and-now and acquires the vision of Cosmic Spirit itself.

(3) The Bliss (*Anand*).—The third in the list of supreme values is the aesthetic experience of wonderfulness, or Vismada, which corresponds to the metaphysical attribute of Freedom on the one hand, and Beauty on the other. Guru Nanak insisted on the cultivation of aesthetic discrimination and gave an honoured



place to taste for music in his scheme of virtues. After 'Naad' and 'Veda' comes 'Giya-Ras,' i.e. sense of sublime music, in one of his value-oriented *shlokas* (verses). Moreover, *Vismada* (ecstasy, wonderfulness) is the main emotional chord in his rhymes representing a state of equipoise (*Sehaj*) and experience of bliss (*Anand*).

(4) Love (*Prem*).—This is the chief value of ethical humanism evolved by the Bhakti movement. This corresponds to Grace aspect of the Divine Person. A human individual who promotes the value of love in life, promotes fraternal feelings among fellow citizens, supports justice in social conduct, and adopts Utilitarian outlook in morals (*Sarbat-da-bhala*). He builds a bridge of communication in a truly cosmopolitan spirit. Guru Nanak's concept of a 'bhakta' incorporates 'loving devotion' (*prema bhakti*) to God and His creation, on the basis of which a new, all-embracing human culture should be possible to build.

(5) Enlightenment (*Prakash*).—This value not only is the necessary pre-requisite for the promotion of virtue and love, and for the performance of duty and justice, but has an intrinsic worth for human life. Enlightenment is the primary condition for rising above superstition and ritualism, sectarian outlook and self-love. It stands for the growing awareness of law (*Dharma-Khand*) in cosmic operations and human affairs, and for pushing forward the frontiers of human knowledge. When Guru Nanak sums up the values and virtues of a worthy life, he counts 'consciousness and ratiocination, commonsense and deciphering the secret of alphabet' as the basic qualities, without which a person is 'really an ass'. The higher qualities of aesthetic taste and sense for music, of wisdom and harmony, are placed after the enlightenment group. Here is an indication of the Guru's strong approval of 'trained intelligence', without which a community is doomed. The highest of educational disciplines, according to Guru Nanak, is contemplation of the wise words of the Enlightener.—

The Guru's Word is Nada,  
the Guru's Word is Veda.

In a sense, all learning and light is meant for making man a better man. Wisdom of the sages and seers like Guru Nanak is directed to the ends of showing light to man and enabling him to recognize a new vitality and dignity in his companions as well as in himself. "When the lamp is lit, darkness is dispelled." The lamp of learning, when lit, removes the darkness of egoism, and inspires men to give out love to mankind. That way lies his own salvation and that way lies emancipation of the community. The practical bearing of the philosophy of Guru Nanak for our age is to contemplate and follow the humanist import of his message that taught: the essence of learning (*vidya*) is altruism (*par-upkar*) :

When learning is truly contemplated  
It makes one a benefactor of all.

## Guru Nanak's Concept of Man

Guru Nanak's compositions portray man in two distinct forms. One is the existential man, the other, the essential man. In the first portrayal, he is presented as a temporal, short-lived creature, unaware of the hour and moment when his being would pass into a state of non-being. The ephemeral spell of human life lasts, at the maximum, through ten stages depicted by the Guru in his *Var Majh* :

First love of the human infant is the breast-milk,  
The second, awareness of mother and dad.  
The third, attachment to brother, his wife, and sister.  
In the fourth place arises love of play,  
In the fifth, absorption in eating and drinking.  
Sixth, dominates sex that cares not for the caste.  
At the seventh stage, man settles down to amass wealth.  
At the eighth, rage causes his body to decay.  
Ninth, set in grey hair and uneasy breath.  
At tenth, body is consigned to flames,  
and man reduced to a lump of ash.

When the vital functions cease, the 'desolate corpse' is left as the remains of man. This strain is repeated by Guru Nanak in other compositions, for instance in the Four Periods (*pehrey*) : In the first period is an account of the birth and the baby's infantile actions. The second period takes the child farther away from the real essence; he gets increasingly involved in the temptations and infatuations of life. The third period finds him a captive of sensual pleasures, engaged in the pursuit of wealth, and wasting life in trivialities. And the fourth period pronounces the 'reaping of the harvest'.

The whole emphasis seems to be on the momentary character of human life against the background of eternity. Man, of course, is tied down to a psychological point of view, which may be contrasted with the standpoint of physics. If man is no more than an event in the infinite series of events, or a link in the evolutionary chain, or a moment in the cosmic order, the probability of his measuring up the entire cosmos or its events in the infinite past and future may not be rated except as extremely low. The 'cosmic order' of Guru Nanak's vision is immeasurably large; its objects are countless. Of the numerous stanzas, one in the composition *Japji* presents the chain of thought picturesquely :

There are worlds beyond worlds below  
and innumerable worlds above.  
We have grown weary of finding their limit :  
this is what the Vedas say.  
And the Western Books put it at eighteen thousand,  
but that, too, in reality comes to the same thing.  
The count could be given, if there were a count;  
men have only perished in the attempt.  
Nanak, let us only say : He is great.  
How great, He alone knows.

(*Trans. Teja Singh*)

The immensity of creation is indeed puzzling. Modern science, five centuries after Guru Nanak, confirms on the basis of its specialized readings and calculations that what man *knows* of the universe is only its fringe. And the more we know, the less we really know, for the real nature of the 'galaxies in flight' and the details of their contours and contents are most likely to remain a big secret for the earthly creature, Man.

The existential man is bound to fail, despite his successive laurels in the field of space-probes, to have a full vision of the existence as a whole, both as being and as becoming. A partial half-truth can hardly claim to know the whole truth; a limited existence in space-time cannot be supposed to encompass the

limitless cosmos, much less its author, if any. Guru Nanak repeatedly underlines the incapacity of man, as a creature, to fully evaluate the creator. For, the 'created one' is helpless in rising to the heights of one who creates.—

If someone were equally high as He is,  
Then alone would he know the Highest One.

(*Japji*)

2

Any idea of the cosmic order, from the point of view of theism and humanism, remains empty and devoid of significance, unless somehow it is correlated to an idea of the self. Indian philosophical tradition has been eloquent on the concept of Self since the days of the Vedas. The range of Vedic literature extends from the worship of Nature to the conception of universal unity, which suggests a single, basic reality expressing itself in a great variety of existence. What is the true essence of this reality ? Is it the same as the 'inward man' or distinct from it ? Answer to these questions was provided by the Upanishads by saying that man was identical with the immanent force of reality.

Indian philosophical tradition offers the postulate of an independent, imperishable Self that underlies the organism and personality of man. The Self, on this view, is not the ego, or the consciousness, or the psyche of an individual. Neither is it an object that could be seen; rather, it is the principle of all seeing, the subject itself. Whatever is experienced, is experienced by the Self; all realization takes place in the Self. And that of which experience and realization take place, is also the Self, otherwise known as Brahman, or the Absolute. This view is not far different from Hegel's Absolute Idea, which he defines as pure thought thinking about pure thought.

The Self as the underlying unity of all persons is not the 'self' of a particular person, which gives man his individuality. Guru Nanak and his successors insist that self-assertion is a great disease, though its remedy also lies within. The disease is egoism,

the remedy that lies within is recognizing the Self underlying the individual frame of personality. This 'Self' is common to all persons, all living beings, and is one with the Absolute Being. The Self knows what is happening in other selves or minds, or in the universal consciousness, simply because it itself is those minds and that consciousness. This perhaps is the meaning of omniscience of the spirit. A man under the spell of the ego is 'shut up within the walls of here-and-now'. The divine spirit, however, is above space and time. "Theologians tell us that God views the universe as one vast whole, without that partiality of sense and feeling to which we are, in a greater or less degree, inevitably condemned."—(Russell). The remedy for us human beings lies in taking on 'something of the immensity of our cosmic contemplations', which is another name for the highest wisdom or harmony, or the state of *sehaj*, occurring time and again in Guru Nanak's verses. In that state, there cease all tensions, all anguish of the human mind, and it becomes possible to lead a life of perpetual equipoise and bliss.

Guru Nanak certainly upheld the Indian concept of emancipation, in terms of *nirvana* or *mukti*, and supplemented it with the Islamic idea of Divine Court or *dargah*, to which only the pious and the truthful would be admitted. But whereas the Buddha started his gospel with the fact of 'suffering' and his ideal of *nirvana* was conceived of by him as a state without a trace of suffering, Guru Nanak spotlighted the brighter aspect of suffering—pain that chastens the mind :

Pain serves as the remedy,  
Pleasure becomes the malady.

A mind chastened by 'suffering' becomes enriched and qualified for happiness at intellectual and aesthetic levels. It prepares the spirit for a state of blissfulness, an essential constituent in any Indian ideal.

### 3

Thus, the way to essential man is through the existential man. It is the concrete, living, social being that discovers within

himself the universal, spiritual man, by transcending his own temporal existence. In other words, man must transcend the ego that, of necessity, acts in his life and obliges him to assert his individuality. Says Guru Nanak : Man takes his birth in egoism and in egoism does he die. The solution indicated in *Assa-di-Var* reads :

When scrutiny of the ego is made

The door to emancipation comes within sight.

When the lamp of wisdom is lit, the darkness of ignorance and self-interest vanishes. When learning is truly contemplated, the individual turns into a benefactor of all. The ego is not killed, or eradicated; it is examined and scrutinized and moulded, so that it loosens its grip over the human personality and opens up the possibility of one's identification with the common Self of humanity, postulated by the Indian philosophical tradition. This reminds one of Socrates' dictum—that an unexamined life is not worth living.

This doctrine of the essence of man furnishes us with the metaphysical outlook of Guru Nanak on the status and being of man as a spark of the Light Divine. Man is an embodiment of this light. Guru Nanak's exhortation to him is to live and act in the illumination of such light. That is the Guru's formula of authentic living. Life led on this principle guarantees a sound cultural foundation for a life of the community without strife, without malice, and without passionate pursuit of egoistic ends.

One merit of the Guru's concept of man is the awakening it entails—awakening about the common lot of mankind. The unity of Self, when realized, convinces a man of the common source of light raising sparks in all living beings. He comes to think about matters larger than his own gains and losses, and is inspired to reflect on the universal life. Guru Nanak's formula of contemplation-cum-service (*simrin* and *seva*) caters for the enlightenment of one's soul as well as for the well-being of the community. It seems to go beyond Spinoza's intellectual love of God; it contains the potentiality of motivating man to inculcate

spirit of dedication to and service of mankind, viewing humanity as God's manifestation.

Guru Nanak's view of the ideal man, thus, presents a picture of the balanced man, who on the one hand reflects on the highest truth of the universe, and, on the other, participates in the life of the community in the role of an active member and a productive agent. His quest for the real man directs him to look for and discover the essence of a universal being concealed within the human frame. The discovery and vision of the spiritual spark, then, informs the entire temporal existence of this regenerate man, both in the personal and the corporate aspects of his life.



## Aspects of Guru Nanak's Humanism

Humanism as a philosophy, ideology and faith has won a sizable following since the Renaissance. Its tradition, however, is as old as Greek philosophy, and Vedic literature. Concern for the welfare of man and the human species can be discerned in the writings of both the theists and naturalists, though the meaning and significance of *humanism* has varied from person to person and school to school.

Guru Nanak, in his compositions, lends support to the adoption of a humanist approach to non-human issues of metaphysics, cosmology and theism. Strictly speaking, the Guru was not a *humanist*, if humanism means that man is the centre of the universe and all the rest of cosmic phenomena operate in order to serve human ends; or if it implies a doctrine of the primacy of human consciousness over forms and forces of nature and even over the presence of a possible Universal Mind. The Guru was definitely not a humanist if Man is held to be primary and the Divine, secondary. There is a seeming conflict between theism and humanism. The Guru on no account could be classified with the humanists, as opposed to the theists. Not a single one of Guru Nanak's hundreds of verses could be cited in support of the contention that he was an adherent of humanism, direct and simple.

### Humanism as a Philosophy

'Humanism' is one of the terms subjected to a variety of definitions and interpretations. The term was applied to the classics containing the 'highest expression of human values'. It was used with reference to humanistic disciplines and arts inspiring a right conduct of life, as also to philosophical systems

upholding the 'dignity and freedom of man'. "In its primary connotation, Humanism means simply human-being-ism, that is, devotion to the interests of human beings, wherever they live and whatever their status." That is how one of the advocates of current humanist thought defines it. 'Humanism, as a philosophy, represents a specific and forthright view of the universe, the nature of man and the treatment of human problems.'—(Corliss Lamont). This view duly acknowledges its debt to the dictum of Alexander Pope: The proper study of mankind is man. Both the philosophical and literary forms of humanism seek to keep man at the centre of the 'intellectual universe'.

The latest definition is one given by Erich Fromm in 'Socialist Humanism', 1967: "Humanism in simplest terms" is "the belief in the unity of the human race and man's potential to perfect himself by his own efforts." At any rate, the new humanism must embrace the whole of mankind. It must reaffirm the spirit of cosmopolitanism and brotherhood of man. Its crucial point is none other than man himself, combined with the idea of his welfare and the promotion of human values through man's own efforts, whether aided by a belief in the need for God's grace or not.

Humanism, technically speaking, may not be a philosophy, since, by its very definition, it cannot indulge in speculation about the entire universe, material, mental or both. Nor can it interest itself in an inquiry into abstract concepts and their meaning. But humanism is decidedly philosophical, when considered a doctrine of values, in the same way as Marxism, Pragmatism and Existentialism are referred to as belonging to the domain of philosophy. These doctrines do not depart from *human truth* and *human values*: they try to construct their own world-view and define their terms in their own fashion.

In recent years, there has been a return to the view that regards human life as the most relevant aspect of the universe. It is the 'continued shaping of man' that has been taking place in

the world. "Life is not an Epiphenomenon in the Material Universe, but the Central Phenomenon of Evolution." This is theorem one of 'Turmoil or Genesis' by the French author, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. He expresses his faith in the evolution of 'some form of higher life or super-life'. His 'faith in man' means a fervent conviction that mankind possesses a 'future', that is 'higher states to be achieved by struggle'. A philosophy that drops humanist considerations from its scope scarcely satisfies the spirit of man to whom it is addressed. For, whom does philosophy address, if not man?

### **Guru Nanak's Philosophy of Humanism**

The metaphysics of Guru Nanak firmly believes in a formless and eternal, absolute and spiritual Essence as the primeval and exclusive source of Time, Existence and Forms. All the values that man may conceive emanate from this Essence, which is immanent, yet transcends the existential forms created out of it. But since values are intrinsically related to experience, their being cannot be conceived apart from human consciousness that seeks to reach out to the cosmic ground of experience. The human approach, therefore, becomes essential in any question of values. This element of inevitability of man, in the axiological region of philosophy, germinates into defence of humanism at the hands of the illustrious thinkers of humanity, whom the Guru represents.

Another consideration that attributes humanism to Guru Nanak, in spite of his avowed theism and firm faith in the primacy of the Divine Spirit, belongs in the realm of human knowledge. Ontologically, the Divine Being may be independent of man's presence or consciousness; values may be interpreted as aspects of the Supreme Being posited by the human mind. But, all knowledge of metaphysical existence, including theological experience, acquires value and meaning only in relation to man. Let us assume that God was prior to all creation, that man is a product of temporal forces set in motion by God. What is the significance of these propositions, except in terms of the fulfilment

of man's quest? Guru Nanak proclaims the existence of the Supreme Reality and the values emanating from it, in order that man may promote values in his life, that man may realize some kind of harmony with the Universal Spirit. He kept the spiritual well-being of man in highest consideration. All speculation, all morality and religious teachings were geared to human welfare. That seems to be the meaning of Guru Nanak's *humanism*.

Finally, on a purely social plane, a third dimension may be added to the humanist outlook of the Guru by interpreting spirituality in his conceptual framework as equivalent to love and service of one's fellow-beings, without distinction of friend and foe. Combined with the view of the inevitable presence of man for postulating values, and the standpoint of values in relation to human welfare, the dimension of fraternity in human relationships helps in the formulation of a synthetic, harmonious and dependable humanism. In such a value-oriented outlook, the individual, the human race and the spiritual essence of things interpenetrate. Indeed, the compositions of Guru Nanak illustrate the non-duality of man and God, and emphasize the identity of theism and humanism.

### **The View of Man**

Guru Nanak's humanism stands on the basis of his concept of man as embodying the spiritual essence of the phenomenal existence. Man's ego that acts as a separatist force has to be obliterated, and the underlying unity of one's self with other selves, and with the supreme Self, is to be realized, in order to experience the non-dual character of the fundamental reality. This leads to a reconciliation between humanism on the one hand and absolutism and theism on the other. The Guru's view of human nature rests on the basis provided by the ancient Indian thought, which holds man to be an abode of gods, or a clue to nature's mysteries. If man, as a rational being, was the measure of all things for Greek philosophers, Indian philosophy held the Absolute as such a measure. That man's self comprises two antithetical elements, is admitted by a large majority of thinkers.

Some view it as higher and lower parts of man's self. Others regard it as prudence and benevolence. Still others treat it as individuality and universality, or uniqueness and all-ness, which grow together 'until at last the most unique becomes the most universal'. In Guru Nanak's terminology, however, the antithetical elements are the spirit (*atman*) and the ego (*houmen*), which represent the essential and the marginal aspects of man. The ego-ridden individual inclines to his impulses and worldly desires—he is a *manmukh* (egocentric) and is spiritually blind. But Guru Nanak, as a spiritual teacher, was a firm believer in the transformation of human nature through effort and training. His whole endeavour was directed to the creation of a society composed of *gurmukhs* (God-centred men), who would raise themselves from ordinary men and women to the level of *brahma-gyanis* (gnostic beings), or supermen.

### The Ultimate Values

Humanism, whether it is naturalistic or idealistic, can scarcely ignore the claims of evolutionism, particularly in the sphere of human activity and morals. Even a naturalist-humanist would admit the substantial contribution made by spiritualism and religion in evolving human society, thus accepting these as organs of evolution and progress. The idealist with his insistence on the primacy of a supreme mind, and positing God as the 'logical prius of the universe', nevertheless, regards intellectual and scientific pursuits of man as of immense benefit to human society. He treats of philosophy as the 'intellectual search for the fundamental truth of things' and religion as the attempt to make the truth dynamic in the soul of man. In his opinion, "a religion that is not the expression of philosophic truth degenerates into superstition and obscurantism, and a philosophy which does not dynamize itself with the religious spirit is a barren light, for it cannot get itself practised." Humanist ethics, thus fortified by religion, philosophy and science, advances towards the promotion of ultimate values in human life, no matter if one man thinks of values in terms of truth and beauty, another views them as justice

and duty, and still another as human happiness, bliss or *anand*.

One of Guru Nanak's stanzas summarizes crisply the human levels of attainment in the following descending order :

There are those who know not 'harmony'  
nor possess 'wisdom',  
Nor do they have 'taste for music',  
nor 'aesthetic discrimination'.  
Neither is 'higher consciousness' in their lot,  
nor 'intelligence',  
Neither 'commonsense' do they possess,  
nor 'know the secret of alphabet'.  
Nanak: doubtlessly, these beings are real asses;  
They pride themselves without any merit.

Man seems to be able to establish a direct communion with God, in whom his belief is based on faith. Melvin Rader, commenting on William James' essay, *The Will to Believe*, remarks "Sometimes it is better to believe in the hope of gaining the truth than to disbelieve in the hope of avoiding error. .... Of course, if God exists and if he is a Being that enters into personal relations with individuals, the faith that one can commune with God may be very helpful in establishing the communion." The "if" in respect of God is perhaps as big as God himself. We may never have complete certainty about God's existence; we may have a belief in the 'probability' of His Being and may set out to inquire into the mystery. "Perhaps the best of all faiths is the faith in inquiry, and this calls for the courage to abide by reason." At any rate, the man who believes is on a relatively secure ground. He only looks forward for the communion, for God's grace and Gnosis. Guru Nanak's highway is open to anyone who decides to proceed in the spirit of faith, and aims at the attainment of equipoise (*sehaj*) and bliss (*anand*).

It may be said that Guru Nanak's philosophy of values, constituting the core of his spiritual humanism, admits to its

range a whole set of values for the vital, mental, aesthetico-moral and spiritual advancement of man. His purview of human excellence extends to the realization of the highest truth that pervades the universe, as well as to the intuitive awareness of the inmost secrets of the human soul. The quintessence of the essence of reality and the effort involved in its attainment produce in the human mind a sense of harmony with the Cosmic Spirit, turning the individual into a 'brahma-gyani' (spiritually enlightened person, or 'gnostic being'), imbued with the spirit of universal well-being.

## Human Society of Guru Nanak's Vision

An insistent emphasis on the excellence of human personality in Guru Nanak's thought does not mean he was preaching some sort of individualism in social and spiritual regions. He seems to be fully alive to the problem of the composition of a society and favours the development of highly disciplined and cultivated individuals, imbued with the ideals of *seva* (service) and collective salvation. In his campaign for the amelioration of the corporate life, the first target of his attack seems to be superstition coupled with empty ritual and hypocrisy. Both his life-history and his verses confirm this aspect of his reformatory mission, an outstanding example being his *Assa-di-Var*, wherein he ruthlessly exposes the nefarious acts of the ruling groups and their supporters, the tricks of the hypocritical 'religious' leaders of both the major communities, and the senseless practices carried on by the harassed and ignorant people.

It is well known that Guru Nanak suggested a socio-economic formula for the re-organization of social relations in the community, in the form :

*Kirat Karo, Wand Chhako, Nam Japo*

"It means, thou shalt earn thy livelihood by honest creative labour, thou shalt share the fruits of thy labour with thy fellow beings, and thou shalt practise the discipline of the Name."—(Kapur Singh). The first of the 'commandments' forbids parasitism in any form, since the stress is laid on *kirat*, i.e. honest productive labour. This covers the Production aspect of economic activity. The second commandment sums up the Consumption and Distribution aspects, when exclusive emphasis on *sharing* the



fruits of labour is laid while not denying the enjoyment of the produce to oneself. The third part of the formula covers the non-economic aspect of one's life; here contemplation is upheld, implying the avoidance of an imbalance that may be caused by an excessive interest in economic activity.

The formula indicated above is applicable to modern societies with necessary modification dictated by the changes in social organization. The broad features of the formula remain valid. Today, we protest against economic exploitation, advocate the meeting of our social obligations by paying our taxes etc. honestly, and insist on the cultivation by each man of an enlightened, balanced and well-adjusted personality. Evidently, the 'commandments' of the Guru meet these demands in a large measure. "From this it follows, that Sikhism regards a co-operative society as the only truly religious society," as put by Sardar Kapur Singh. "Sikhism conceives of the religious evolution of man as a necessary and integral pre-requisite and condition of its march towards the ideal society." A good society does not seem possible without good individuals who compose it. Guru Nanak chose to address the individual and plead with him to be worthy of a society of godly men, which he preferred to call *sadh sangat* (*lit.* a congregation of saints). It is, however, true that he did not propound a concrete economic programme for the re-organization of society; nor did he reject the established feudal set-up out of hand. At any rate, the germ of a socialistic, cooperative set-up is present in his thought.

When we consider the fact that Guru Nanak was primarily a spiritual leader brought up in the Bhakti tradition, we are content with the sketchy outline of the society of his vision available in his works. We do not demand of him a theory of the distribution of political power, or full-fledged democratic system, or the principles of economic security, security from wars, need of leisure, and so on. What we can legitimately expect from him is a spirit of tolerance, social justice and participation in the community life. We can claim to be enlightened about the path leading to the ethical and spiritual progress. In these matters he

obliges us to the full.

One of the characteristic marks of the individual who should join hands with others to compose an ideal society, according to the Guru, is 'cosmic consciousness', which he termed *Brahma-gyan*. The major emphasis here is evidently on the enhancement of knowledge and true wisdom. Only the spiritually evolved men and women are qualified to function as members of what Sri Aurobindo calls a 'gnostic race' of beings. Guru Nanak's *Brahma Gyani* is the prototype of the 'gnostic individual', for "the gnosis is the effective principle of the spirit, a highest dynamis of the spiritual existence. The gnostic individual would be the consummation of the spiritual man; his whole way of being, thinking, living, acting would be governed by the power of a vast universal spirituality."

The 'gnostic age' of Guru Nanak's vision would be no more than a pious and idle dream if it were not supported by a recognition of the need for economic, social and political institutions. His picture of the ideal society envisages each individual as a 'hero' of humanity, who is either a 'valiant, mighty and forceful' soul, intoxicated by the powers of the Divine; or an elevated soul like Sita, pure and lustrous, whose radiance is beyond description; or a *bhakta* (devotee) who, with the Lord ever in his heart, dwells in perpetual bliss. The social organization with its material base can serve at best as a mechanism for producing and maintaining heroic individuals; it cannot be an end in itself, at least for a humanist thinker. The Guru seems to be in favour of a system in which each individual is enabled to work out his salvation in collaboration with like-minded individuals composing a society of sages (*Sadh-Sangat*).

A continuous socio-economic advancement is imperative for keeping the social organization intact and in a state that ensures provision of material comforts and the imparting of necessary skills. No serious thinking leader of men has denied the importance of economic satisfaction of man as a necessary condition for progress in other spheres of life. But it has also been recognized that legal and political methods alone are not sufficient for

keeping social relations in a desirable state. Ethics and religion have to play their part in promoting feelings of friendliness and goodwill, and in keeping the hostile and unsocial feelings in check. The course, however, is important not in the interest of social cohesion alone but in order to elevate the spiritual status of man. Moral principles and religious discipline are pressed into service for turning out heroes of mankind, not of Nietzsche's 'superman' type, with love of power as the dominant motive, but the type (*virle-jan*, the distinguished ones) who set before themselves aims of impersonal character, who are interested in the promotion of wisdom, and who would ensure the powers they possess to be utilized in serving the causes of humanity.

Such persons have been commended as *pradhan*, the leading lights; their 'deity' is charity (*daya*), their 'rosary' is *khima* (forgiveness).

"It is not ultimately by violence that men are ruled, but by wisdom of those who appeal to the common desire of mankind, for happiness, for inward and outward peace, and for the understanding of the world in which, by no choice of our own, we have to live."—(Bertrand Russell)

Skill without wisdom may prove to be harmful, even destructive; and material comfort unaccompanied by moral and spiritual discipline may prove unworthy of man. The need of an optimum level of economic security for each individual and family, coupled with a balance between material comfort and spiritual growth, can hardly be overemphasized. Some of the poet-sages of the *Adi-Granth*, notably Dhanna and Kabir, asked their Lord for affording two square meals daily, plus other reasonable comforts of life, *so that* they could concentrate on the divine pursuit unhampered by physical wants. Guru Nanak, however, cautioned against an excess of material enjoyment. Some of his verses in *Sri-Raga* are notable for their picturesque presentation of the attractions of life that tend to impede one's progress towards spiritual fulfilment.—

Were my palace built of rubies,  
were it jewel-inlaid;

Were it full of pleasing flavours,  
 were it fragrance-made.  
 Let me not be lost in these,  
 lest I forget Thy Name.

In another hymn, he counts the joys of 'eating and drinking of the Lord's blessings, forbidding such eating and dressing, such riding and sleeping that would lead to anguish in the end.—

Avoid the act of eating, O man,  
 that kills the joy of life,  
 That makes the body suffer, and  
 puts evil in the mind.

Virtues of temperance and moderation have been extolled since long; Guru Nanak and his spiritual colleagues focussed attention on a life of contemplation and service which rested on temperance (*sanjam*) and judicious use of the material means (*santokh*).

## Humanist Ethics of Guru Nanak

A major part of Guru Nanak's poetic compositions is devoted to the affirmation of the absolute power of the Almighty, who is credited with will, consciousness and so on. In contrast with the limited extent of the application of the human will, the Divine will has no limits; the Absolute Person enjoys absolute powers. Numerous stanzas of Guru Nanak lay stress on the distinction between the divine and human wills :

Whatever He chooses, happens,  
Nothing else can occur at all.

*(Sri Raga)*

Whatever He wills, comes to pass,  
O Nanak,  
What can a human being do ?

*(Assa)*

That alone happens what is  
in His will...

*(Maru)*

These and other instances with similar import are indicative of Guru Nanak's firm faith in an absolutist philosophy. There are on the other hand, passages which establish him as a humanist thinker, though one can hardly attribute an anthropocentric view to the Guru. He did not say, categorically or otherwise, that Man is the centre of the universe. Yet, viewed from the angle of human welfare, and in the light of his stress on values, he may be regarded as one of the leading humanists of mankind.

The question arises : can the two strands in the Guru's philosophy be reconciled ? If he is an absolutist in metaphysics

and a humanist in ethical and spiritual approach, it may perhaps be difficult to avoid conflicts in his composite thought? It is true, humanism as a philosophic school arose in protest against absolutism in philosophy. But it is also true that great metaphysical systems that took a rigid stand on monism and absolutism, nevertheless sought to enlighten *man* as such. Their ultimate appeal was directed to thinking beings; the philosophers, though exclusively describing the reality of their vision on a purely logical plane, with hardly any reference to humanity or life, were after all trying to convince the earthly men and women of the cogency of their opinions and beliefs. In this sense, all metaphysical thought is linked to the rationalistic interests of humanity.

Two methods are open, according to the Guru, to interlink the self to the Supreme Reality. One is through realizing the divine 'order' prevailing in the cosmos; the other is examining the 'ego' and comprehending its true nature. In other words, the truth may be spotted in either macrocosmic or microcosmic existence. In either case, the aim appears to be to reconcile the absolutist conception with the demands of a humanist philosophy. It is like introducing our finite being to the absolute Being; it is, so to say, attaining a state of being where "I" shares the character of the Cosmic Mind, which is the ground of all finite minds.

An important implication of such an attempt at reconciling the human and the universal points of view, is the adoption of the discipline of the mind as a method of overcoming the separatist tendencies of the ego. A *niskama* or non-attached mind seems to be a necessary pre-requisite for the final realization of *communion*. That must be the reason for Guru Nanak's insistence on self-discipline and a life of virtue. Secondly, the goal of opening out one's mind on the Supreme Mind involves recognition of other finite minds in similar quest for a broader perspective. The necessity of a sympathetic participation in the efforts of mankind in this regard cannot, therefore, be overlooked. A further implication of such a line of thinking, surely, is the adoption of the method of universal love, so

amply prescribed in the verses of Guru Nanak.

Development of 'impersonal feeling' is said to be the essence of a life of the spirit. All effort of the sages and heroes of humanity, the Buddha and Christ and Nanak included, was bent to the creation of a society of men who would rise above their individual, limited existence. The ultimate basis of all ethical teaching may be traced to the principle of each particular in its own character expressing the general. Even the most unique of persons may represent the spirit of the most universal. It is not necessary to conform to a set pattern of conduct for enlarging one's feelings. "Though morality commands conformity, all moral progress is due to nonconformists," says Radhakrishnan. It is the 'cultivated mind' and the 'fashioned will' that the moral training aims at producing. "Culture is that which remains when we forget everything that we learn, even as character is what remains when we forget all the deeds we did."

## 2

The early Aryans believed in a world of action. The Vedic principle of *Rta*, which subsequently took the form of *dharma*, was in essence a principle of *karma* or activity. It was a *karmamayam jagat*, i.e., a universe sustained by an activist principle. The nature of the universe could be understood and transformed only through action. According to Mimamsa, atoms were brought together by *karma* (motion), which is analogous to the modern view holding the laws of motion as the determinants of various forms of matter. The potency of Indian philosophy of action may be judged from the doctrine that the present *karma* can transform the future life of man. The traditional *Karma-yoga* (the path of action) as a means of emancipation, though distinct from the paths of knowledge and love, was inescapably involved in both the *Gyan-marga* (the path of knowledge) and the *Bhakti-marga* (the path of devotion).

In the context of such a predominantly activist tradition of thought, Guru Nanak heralded an ethical theory which emphasized action, knowledge and contemplation in equal measure. 'Effort' is one of the basic notions of the Sikh ethics evolved

by Guru Nanak. It implies at once a taboo and a positive morality. What is not to be done requires to be resisted; it requires an amount of effort, as much as what is prescribed as the right conduct in personal and social life does.

The preparation of the individual, through constant practice of the virtues of truthfulness, temperance and contemplation, aided by a process of the 'minting of pure gold', leads to the formation of 'the chosen one'. By controlling individualistic inclinations, by ever expanding the scope of charitable, altruistic tendencies through *seva* (service of others), without expectation of a reward in turn, one transfigures oneself completely. He is now the valiant one possessed of divine 'force', a characteristic of the indweller of *Karam-Khand*, the region of ethical truth and values. This is the stage of fulfilment, of which mystics have spoken as the stage of superman, and which the Gurus have described as the stage of *Brahma-gyani*. Cosmic consciousness, equipoise (*sehaj*) and identification of the interests of the self with those of the community are the salient features of the realized soul. Only a man of *contentment* can perform *service* and promote the general causes :

Service is done by men of contentment,  
 who contemplate Truth and nothing but Truth.  
 Such men do not step into sin;  
 they practise virtue and perform their duty.  
 They eat and drink in moderation,  
 and snap their ties with worldly attachments.

(*Assa-di-Var*)

Guru Nanak seems to be acutely aware of the Utilitarian bias of ethical principles. Ethics being essentially a social subject deals with human problems and, as such, cannot dispense with human conduct, ideals and values. It may be possible to discuss the nature of 'good', 'virtue', 'evil' and other ethical concepts on a purely metaphysical plane, without reference or application to the social life of man. But 'morality' has to be a human affair, and ethics as a study of the principles of human conduct in a



social context cannot be other than humanist. In the words of Melvin Rader, "A humanistic ethics is opposed to an absolutism which would deny the realistic basis of ethics in human needs and circumstances but it is equally opposed to a relativism which would deny the ethical significance of our common humanity. Good is the affirmation of human life, the unfolding of man's powers. Evil is the negation of life, the frustration of human needs and capacities." Ethical life, in this sense, is geared to the formation of *sachiar*, that is, one attuned to Truth, which in Guru Nanak's terminology means a spiritually emancipated individual.

## **Cultural Significance of Guru Nanak's Teachings**

The controversy whether economic satisfaction or spiritual elevation of man is of primary importance can hardly be resolved by siding with either extreme. A solution seems to be in the middle, that is, in combining the two in a way most conducive to the enrichment of human experience. Guru Nanak's accent on the cultivation of personality, through control of the impulsive part and through conscious development of the social part of man's nature, underlines the need of a balanced outlook on the material and ideal aspects of life. While addressing the individual, he starts with self-discipline and self-denial. In the words of Arnold Toynbee, "For Nanak the fundamental truth was that, for a human being, the approach to God lies through self-abnegation; and this is indeed the chief message of most of the higher religions that have made their appearance up to date."

It is true the Guru undertook to reform and remodel the social and communal relations of the late fifteenth century India, yet the relevance of his message of balance and equipoise cannot be denied in the present age. He belonged to that "minority of discerning spirits who have seen that, at bottom, Hinduism and Islam are each an expression of same fundamental religious truth, and that these two expressions are therefore reconcilable with each other and are of supreme value when brought into harmony." Attempt was made by him not only to synthesize the Hindu and Islamic theologies in a new faith, but also to evolve a composite culture that required a Hindu to be a good Hindu and a Muslim to be a true Muslim. For, he seemed to believe

that virtues like compassion, modesty, piety, and honest living are preached by both the religions and the individual who strove to be a true follower of his religion, would eventually turn out to be a good *man*. To the Muslims, who observe five prayers (*namaz*) a day, he advised :

Make the first prayer, truth;  
 The second to lawfully earn your daily bread;  
 The third: charity in the Name of God,  
 Fourth : Purity of the mind,  
 Fifth : the adoration of God.  
 Practise these five virtues,  
 And let good deeds be your article of faith:  
 the Kalma;  
 Then you can call yourself truly a Muslem.

(*Majh ki Var*)\*

Similar advice was administered to Brahmins, Yogis, preachers and self-styled teachers of people.—

That man who calls himself a teacher of truth,  
 But lives by begging, do not pay him homage;  
 The man who earns his bread by the sweat of his brow,  
 And gives some of his gains in charity  
 Knoweth, Nanak, the true way of life.

(*Var Sarang*)†

It was the 'way of life' that the Guru wanted people to cultivate assiduously. This 'way', according to him, comprises a human and earthly life yet detached from the world, just as the 'lotus flower floats in the pool', without getting wet or drowned; a life of discipline and control of passions, for 'lust and wrath waste the body, as borax melts the gold'; a contemplative life that rests, not on 'reading cartloads of books' which is simply the 'fret and fever of the egoistic minds', but on understanding the secret of 'freedom from bondage'. He warned people against 'violence, infatuation, greed and pride, which are insatiate like a restless river'. He detested caste distinctions and pride in 'noble

\*Trans. Unesco Series : *The Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*

†Ibid.

birth and fame, which are worthless as dust'; he reprimanded those who despised women—since 'of a woman are we conceived, of a woman we are born'. The true way of life forbids one to 'waste one's day and night in pursuit of sensual pleasures', and sell this 'precious human life' so cheaply. An honourable place in the divine Court is assured, only if 'service is performed in the world'.

The significance of this emphasis on self-cultivation can be correctly realized when the individual is considered in the context of his social and cultural relationships. He has to conduct himself as a decent, dignified, enlightened individual, with a sense of the collective destiny of mankind. The training that self-cultivation, prescribed in Guru Nanak's verses, affords to the individual, helps him to acquire the outlook of a 'universal man', not confined within the narrow limits of here-and-now. In contemplating the cosmic order of the Divine, he comes to imbibe some of the divine qualities, as also a consciousness that itself is cosmic. It is, therefore, not without reason that wisdom and harmony have been honoured as the highest human pursuits in Guru Nanak's ethical discipline.

## 2

Guru Nanak was essentially a teacher. This assertion is supported by the historical and biographical information extant about him; it is also supported by the moral directives available in his works, particularly those addressed to the self-deluded followers of external forms of piety; but above all it is supported by the quality of his poetry that satisfies the immanent and the transcendent ends of knowing the Truth. It satisfies the craving for knowledge; it also satisfies the insight that seeks to probe the real nature of reality. He has suggested a methodology by which to attain a revelation of the hidden aspect of phenomena. For those who elect to see the light this way, faith in his methodology and portrayal of reality is a 'factual' belief; it actually affects the mode of life as well as inner being of the disciple. One who is genuinely inspired by this faith, has the

‘perception’ without an element of coercion. “It is indeed a commonplace of contemporary theology that God does not force an awareness of himself upon men, but leaves them free to become conscious of him by an uncompelled response of faith.”—(John Hick)

What Guru Nanak attempted to do was to build this ‘response of faith’ in his disciples, not merely by issuing commandments, but by actually showing them the path to salvation. The *guru* is himself realized, that is, he is in communion with the Essence. He is to pass on, or transmit, the experience of spiritual union and the attendant blissfulness to willing seekers. This cannot be achieved through outlining an intellectual approach to the subject, nor through sermonizing and moralizing. It requires mastery, by stages, on the part of the seeker, of the technique of automatic contemplation in the midst of worldly chores. The efforts is buttressed by participation in holy assembly considered to be an embodiment of the *guru*’s spirit. The verses of Guru Nanak and his successors are supposed to serve the purpose of giving guidance and imparting spiritual direction, in place of the Guru in person.

What is of greatest importance from educative point of view is the transformation of ordinary men and women into *bhaktas*, through the Guru’s inspiration and guidance. A *bhakta* or devotee is not the other-worldly being, unconcerned with the occurrences taking place around him, in his family, community or country. He is, on the other hand, an active participant in the social life to which he belongs, and by the light of his contemplative disposition tries to raise and enhance the quality of that life. Prof. Puran Singh, who calls the Gurus ‘greatest man-makers of the whole world of men’, describes the form of devotion of the Gurus’ vision thus : “The Bhakti feelings of our devotion to God are not of the miserable man who in his utter smallness dares rise to evolve systems by which to perfect himself as a lover, as a saint, as a seer, but we wait in intense activity to be loved by Him. Few understand this silent revolution of ideals.” The

Guru's conception of a *bhakta* is of a man constructively engaged in drawing out the best in him and helping his companions to work out their way to salvation.

Guru Nanak is widely acknowledged as a social reformer and spiritual teacher, who insisted on the eradication of superstition and ignorance from men's minds. These were to be replaced by a growing awareness and enlightenment that he termed *gyan*, but which did not connote simply empirical or sensory knowledge. The Guru's function, as he averred, is to furnish the individual with the spiritual vision or knowledge, so as to dispel the 'darkness of ignorance'. It was the teacher in him speaking when he said :

Just as the body and its limbs, hands and feet,  
Are cleansed with water when they become dusty;  
Just as the clothes are washed clean with soap  
When these are soiled with filth;  
The mind, when dirty with evil thoughts,  
Is rendered clean with contemplation of Nam. (Japji)

Poetry itself is a powerful instrument to 'purify' the mind with. But the Guru's verses have the added effect of sharpening the wit of the disciple who cares to grasp the spirit of his teaching. He leads the disciple to an expanding awareness of the working of the world, and onward to a consciousness of the cosmos, which is equivalent to apprehension of the meaning and purpose of creation. This is the stage of *Brahma-Gyan* in Guru Nanak's parlance.

Evidently, the Guru was aiming at evolving a perfectionist morality. While he did not despise acts of enjoying common comforts of life and love, rest and relaxation in moderation, he taught men to catch moments of 'peak experience', that is moments of 'tremendous intensification of the very highest of values. Says Melvin Rader : "In life at its very best, there are experiences of absolute delight, perfect in themselves. ... The only words to express these mountain-peaks of value are like those of Shakespeare : 'O wonderful, wonderful, and most wonderful wonderful'..." Guru Nanak's *Aarti* is one of such compositions expressing the glorious experience of life.



**Metaphysical Gleanings**

*from*

**Nanak - Bani**



ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ

ਪੰਨਾ 1

ਪੰਨਾ 2

## **Truth**

Truth, when nothing else was  
Truth, when process of Time started  
Truth, what the present sustains  
Truth, O Nanak, shall ever remain

*(Japji)*

## **Ordinance, the *Hukam***

**He who recognizes the Ordinance,  
O Nanak,  
Never shall assert his ego again.**

*(Japji)*

## **The Absolute**

**The One Positive Essence,  
Protector of all Existence.  
The Reality Supreme,  
Manifest in Truth.  
The Principle of Creation,  
The Conscious Being.  
Controlled by none,  
Contradicted by none.  
Reality transcending Time,  
Immanent in Cosmic Form.  
Not cast in the womb,  
Installed by none.  
Enlightener of all,  
Grace on all.**

***(Mul-Mantra)***

## **The Play**

**The Absolute Essence created Itself  
That is, the world of names and forms.  
He then created the order of Nature  
To joyously view the play therefrom.**

*(Assa-di-Var)*

## Definitions

The real benefactor is a person  
who truly contemplates learning.  
He is a dweller of holy places  
who tames the passions five.  
Intuitive bells of yogis tinkle  
If mind is absorbed in Thee;  
The devil would dare not touch me then,  
nor cast his shadow on me.  
Such a one is *sanyasi* real  
who nothing expects, nor hopes.  
He enjoys the body best  
who keeps the lust in check.  
Who is the merciful *digambra* ?  
who turns the eyes within;  
He kills the pride of the self,  
none else would ever he kill  
Thou art one, Thy forms are many,  
Nanak knows not all Thy planning.

(Assa)

## **The Will**

He alone knows the will of God  
who concentrates on the Divine.  
He accepts and merges in the Will  
And knows not mine and thine.

*(Maru)*

## **Thy Extent**

Were my life-time a million years long  
And were I to live on a diet of water;  
Were I never to see the sun and moon  
And lead my life inside a cave;  
Were I never to think of rest  
And never enjoy a sleepful night;  
Could not I know Thy value still  
And how great is Thy creation's extent.

*(Sri Raga)*



## **Death**

Neither kings remain, nor beggars  
Neither the rich, nor the poor.  
When the destiny's date approaches  
None would console the parting soul.

*(Onkar)*

## **The Real**

**Real are the cosmic parts  
Real are Thy universes  
Real is the threefold world  
Real all Thy forms  
Real all Thy deeds  
Real all Thy thoughts  
Real is Thy writ  
Real is Thy court  
Real is Thy order  
Real Thy command  
Real is Thy grace  
Real Thy seal and stamp**

*(Assa-di-Var)*

## **The Power**

Out of the featureless Void  
came the wind and water  
The Creator instals the fortress  
with mind as body's monarch  
In water, life and light  
resides the Creator's power.

*(Maru)*

## **Magnitude**

Were I to read thousand tons of script  
And faithfully follow their content,  
Were I to write with abundance of ink,  
And with speed of the wind,  
Could not I be able still  
To measure Thy worth  
Or Thy creation's extent,  
O Lord !

*(Sri Raga)*

## **The Deed**

**The Ordainer by His Will  
ordains the ways of the world;  
Nanak : He, the carefree One,  
delights in His deed.**

*(Jappi)*

## **The Void**

Out of the featureless Void  
were born the earth and sky  
All was held by power of Truth  
without a pillar or tie  
He creates the threefold Nature  
and Himself ends its life.  
Out of the featureless Void  
arose the species and speech  
Out of the Void they flow,  
into Him they cease.  
He, the Creator, puts up the show,  
the wondrous play, for all to see.

*(Maru)*

## **Virtue**

Listen, O mind, my darling friend,  
Here is a chance to meet the Lord :  
As long the youthful looks sustain  
And as long the body breathes not last.  
Then it turns into heap of clay  
Devoid of virtue, it's useless all.  
O my mind, earn the good  
Before you proceed to meet the Lord.

*(Sri Raga)*

## **The Pilgrims**

Pilgrims set out to holy places  
with treacherous bodies, corrupted souls  
There they take a round of baths  
and think the sins are off  
A part of pollution do they wash,  
but dirt of pride they add twofold  
Their bodies glitter like a glass  
but within they hold poison pure  
A good man is good even without wash  
A thief is but a thief, howsoever soaked.

*(Suhī Var)*



## **Conduct**

False attractions and infatuations  
dominate the world entire  
Looks of youthful women  
kindle the sensual fire  
Love of gold and love of sons—  
day by day augmented  
All is welcome as my own  
God alone excepted

*(Prabhati)*

## Learning

Let one read cartloads of books  
Let one read the whole caravans  
Put his books in boats and ships  
And dig up wells to store them all.  
Let one read throughout the life  
All the years and months there are—  
Let not a single breath go waste  
But do the reading round the clock.  
The *account* will rest on one performance  
All else is ego's craving, and false.

*(Assa-di-Var)*

## **Truthful Living**

**All else falls short of Truth,  
Yet higher than Truth  
Is the conduct truthful.**

*(Sri Raga)*

## Ecstasy

Wonder, wonder is the harmony of *Naada*  
Wonder, wonder the wisdom of *Veda*  
Wondrous is life, wondrous the mystery  
Wondrous the form, wondrous the colour  
Wondrous the species roaming uncovered.  
Wondrous the wind, wondrous the water  
Wondrous the fire with playful charm.

\* \* \*

Looking at the grand wondrous show  
I find myself in ecstatic mood  
The mystery is revealed to him alone  
Who has earned a perfect fortune.

(*Assa-di-Var*)

## **Exploiters**

**If a single stain of blood  
makes the dress polluted,  
Why treat them pure and clean  
who are human blood suckers ?**

*(Var Majh)*

## **The Fish**

Thou art like the ocean deep  
with endless wisdom and power  
I am like a roving fish  
and measure Thy worth can never.  
In all directions find I Thee  
away from Thee I live not the hour.  
Know not I a hand that supports  
know not I the fisherman's net  
When the pains of life abound  
Thee alone do I recollect.

*(Sri Raga)*

## **The Support**

I worry not about the oncoming death  
Nor wish my life to last.  
All Thy creatures look to Thee  
Who keep account of the present and past.  
Thy abode is inside the hearts  
That ever remain in Thy will steadfast.  
*(Sri Raga)*

## **The End**

Death would not give a date  
It approaches un-invited  
Some are already gone  
Others are getting ready  
Some already winding up  
Some waiting for the sign  
With trumpets the army departs  
Leaving the palaces behind.  
Man, a bundle of dust, O Nanak,  
Returns to dust in time.

*(V'ar Sarang)*



by **Wazir Singh**

Aspects of Guru Nanak's Philosophy

Guru Nanak Siddhant

Nanak Bani Chintan

Guru Nanak's Theory of Truth

Yunani Vichardhara di Kahani

Sikh Dharm Darshan (ed.)

Namdev : Jivan te Darshan (trans.)

Guru Gobind Singh's Philosophy of Values

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